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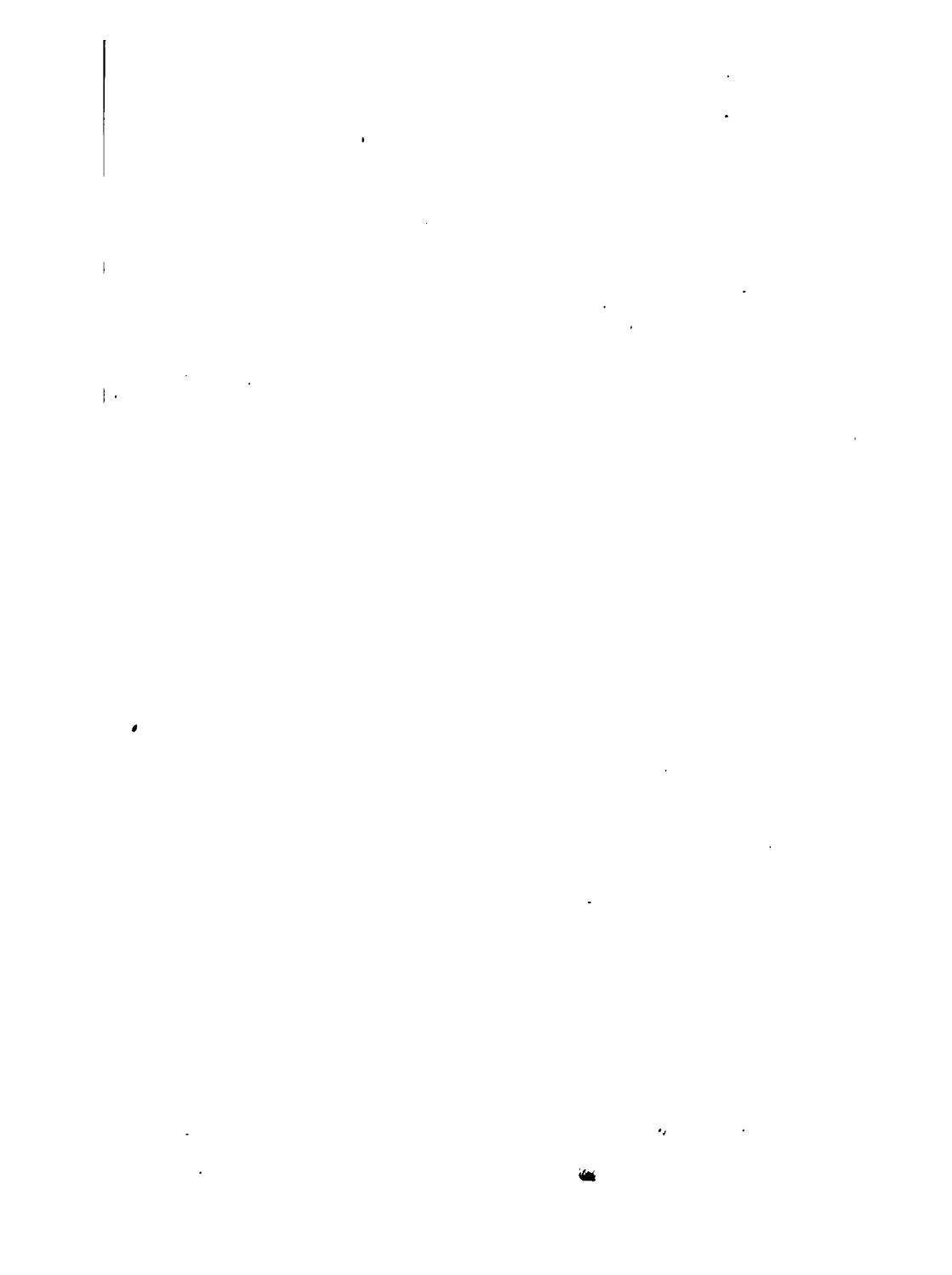
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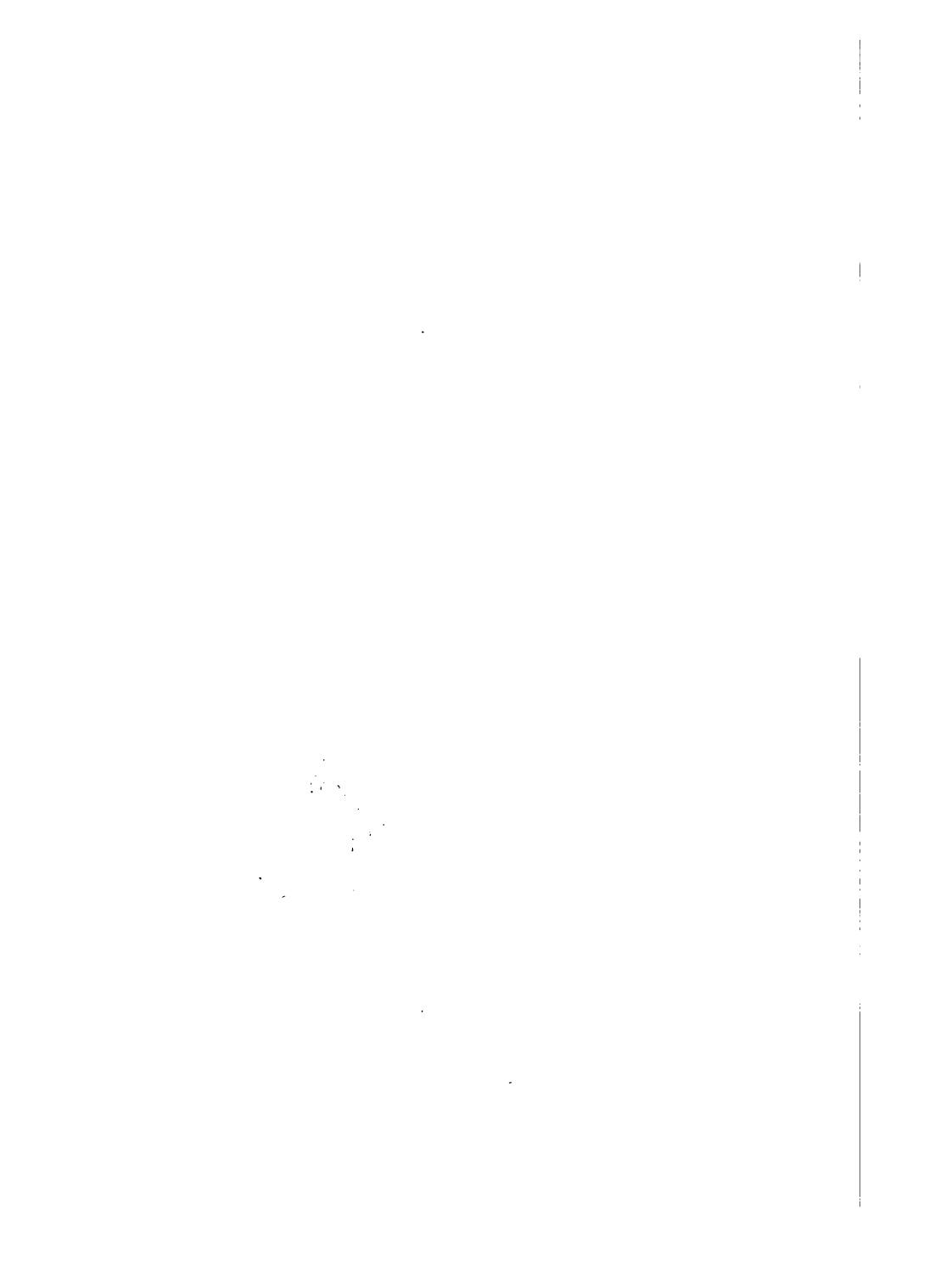


A YOUNG MAN'S FANCY

WITH

OTHER TALES.

VOL. II.



A YOUNG MAN'S FANCY

WITH

OTHER TALES.

BY

MRS. FORRESTER

AUTHOR OF

“VIVA,” “MIGNON,” “DIANA CAREW,”
&c., &c.

“A young man's fancy lightly turns to thoughts of love.”

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. II.



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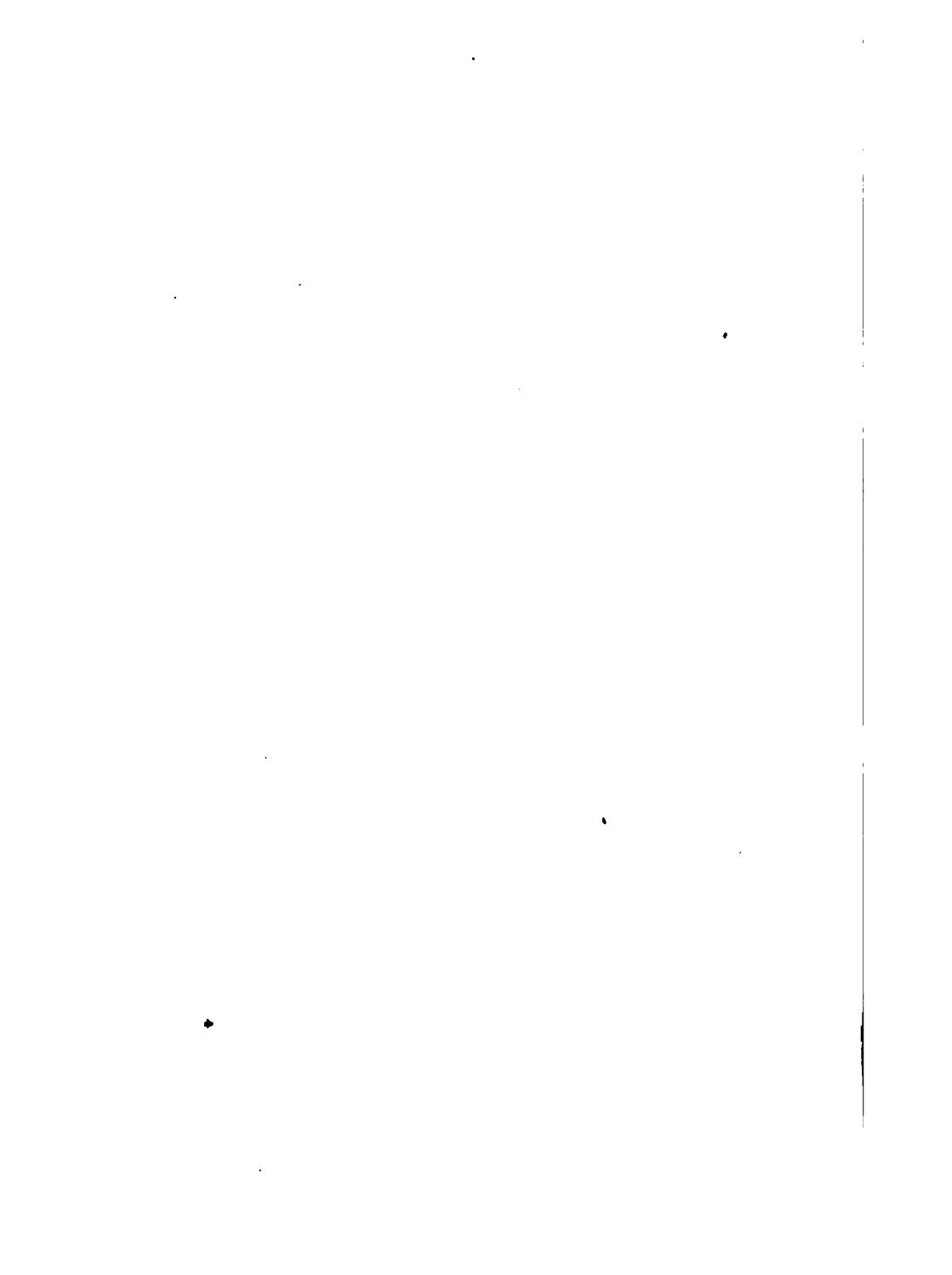
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IN A COUNTRY HOUSE.

VOL. II.

B



IN A COUNTRY HOUSE.

IT is four p.m. on a dull November day —all but dark. A private omnibus, drawn by two handsome, powerful bays, pulls up in front of an imposing stone portico. The groom gives a ringing peal at the bell, the doors fly open in response, and a grave, decorous personage, attended by satellites, comes to help the occupants of the omnibus to alight. Mistress and maid, evidently. The lady is so befurred and veiled, you can pronounce no opinion upon her at present, except that, from the lightness with which she descends, and enters the house, you may be sure she is both young and slight. But in a moment she has thrown off her travelling mantle,

and unpinned her veil, and you may safely assert that she is a very elegant woman, and, if not exactly pretty, eminently *distinguée*. She follows the butler up the grand staircase, between statues and flowers blooming as in the plenitude of June, through the vestibule, along a corridor, and into a charming boudoir. A wood fire burns brightly in the quaint old chimney; one lamp, softly shaded, throws a delicious light over the thousand and one gems of art that are scattered about—a silver *tête-à-tête* tea-service, stands temptingly near the fire, and a pleasant voice, in accents of warm welcome, completes the agreeable impression.

“ So here you are, my dear ! I am delighted to see you. So sorry Mr. Gore Barton could not get here in time for to-day’s sport; however, he will come in for the two best days, to-morrow and Thursday. Where is he ? Haven’t you brought him with you ?”

Thus Lady Kyndhart volubly—then Mrs. Gore Barton in reply—

“ He won’t be here until the last train, unfortunately. Lord Henry had his big day to-day, and it was an old promise that George should make one of the party. He told me to tell you and Sir John that he had never in his life wanted so much to be in two places at once.”

“ Very kind of him to say so. And now about yourself. Do you think you are really stronger ?”

“ Oh ! indeed I am. Not like the same person since I went to live in London. That is my ‘ happy hunting ground,’ you know, and it is George’s turn to grumble. However, his friends are very good to him, and I think, of the two, he has more sport than when we lived in that horrid Clay-shire, which nearly gave me my death.”

“ ‘ All’s well that ends well !’ ” says Lady Kyndhart. “ Here is your tea, my dear. I know you are dying for it.”

Mrs. Gore Barton puts a pretty well-booted foot on the fender, sips her tea and looks thoroughly comfortable and very much at home.

"Now, dear Lady Kyndhart, tell me all the news. And first of all, who are your guests—anyone I know?"

"Let me think. Colonel and Mrs. Temple?"

Mrs. Gore Barton shakes her head.

"Mr. and Mrs. Henry Walton."

"By sight only."

"Lord John West."

"Slightly."

"Captain and Mrs. Gordon."

"A very pretty woman?"

"Yes."

"I have met her."

"Lord and Lady Saybel and Dulcibella Skunk."

"Yes; I stayed with them at the De Warres."

"Charlie Wyndham and Captain Carew.

Now I have gone through the whole list."

"None of the old set," remarks Mrs. Gore Barton a shade regretfully.

"Sir John is fond of new faces, you know," replies Lady Kyndhart, "and really our parties wanted a little new blood infused into them. No! you and your husband were the only two of the old set we really could not do without. Of course we have offended the rest for ever. If you ask the same people three years running, they consider they have a perfect right to be invited on the same occasion for the rest of their natural lives."

"We must consider ourselves very fortunate," laughs Mrs. Gore Barton, "and I promise, though it may be very difficult, not to be vindictive next year when we have to give way to newer blood."

"Ah! my dear Dora, you need not be afraid; I shall always ask you as long as you will come, from purely selfish motives—first, because I am fond of you, secondly,

because you are such a charming guest and amuse everyone else, and thirdly, because your husband is such a capital shot. Now then, come and see your room ; it is your favourite one, with the sky-blue hangings and the best view in the house. When you are rested, come back here or into the small drawing-room and be introduced to the women."

"Where are they now ?"

"Lady Saybel and Mrs. Temple are driving, and the others are—need I say it ?—gone after the men. Nothing will keep them away. The men may give hints, and the papers may write about women thrusting themselves into men's pursuits, but they will do it. You and I have more sense, my dear."

Nearly an hour has elapsed. Dora, (we will dispense with formality), has doffed her travelling attire and been invested in a very becoming tea-gown ; her hair has been rebraided close to her pretty little head,

for she does not affect the curls and bows and frizzes that, as Colonel —— says, give "such an enormous scope for false hair," and being tired of the solitude of her room, descends the stairs towards the morning-room. In the long corridor she pauses. Dora is not afflicted with shyness, but it is rather formidable to face half a dozen strange women with no hostess to perform the introductions. She knows that Lady Kyndhart always selects this hour for repose. So she elects to go softly into the boudoir until my lady emerges from her retreat, or the men come in from shooting or something happens to make the ordeal less trying. As she drops into a cosy chair by the fire, a babel of voices from the next room makes her congratulate herself upon her determination.

Now the boudoir opens with large double folding doors into the morning-room, and the morning-room into the little drawing-room, and the little drawing-room

into the big drawing-room, and the big drawing-room into the ante-chamber, and the ante-chamber into the dining-room, and it is the custom at Elton Court when the house is full of guests to have all these doors open except those of the dining-room to display the whole magnificent suite. The effect is imposing, but there is a want of privacy about it, as you never know who may be in the adjoining apartments unless you acquaint yourself by investigation.

Dora, sitting by the fire, can hear, but has no means of seeing the party assembled in the next room, nor is she visible to them.

As everyone seems to be talking at once and no particular voice is distinctly heard, Dora has, at first, no uneasiness on the score of eaves-dropping. Presently, however, there comes a lull, and she hears most audibly the question put by one of the fair chatterers to another,

“By the way, are there not some new arrivals to-day?”

“Yes,” is the prompt answer. “The Gore Bartons. I think *she* has come.”

Dora begins to feel an unpleasant sensation. She hopes they are not going to talk about her. She is woman of the world enough to know how rarely a person can be discussed in society without something he would not care to hear being said about him, even when the party is not an ill-natured one. She begins to think she will go for fear of ranking with the “listeners” who “never hear any good of themselves.” But whilst she is debating, the blow falls.

“I daresay she will come down when she thinks the men are in,” says a glib pert voice with an unpleasant laugh, which poor Dora recognises as belonging to the Honourable Dulcibella Skunk. “She is probably getting herself up now and will

come down gorgeously apparelled for conquest."

Dora's face burns, and she wishes ardently that she had not elected to array herself in her pretty new tea-gown.

Another voice joins in—a low drawling voice with a slightly nasal intonation. Dora knows it, but cannot put a name to it.

"I wonder where she gets the money to dress as she does. I believe they are quite poor. I don't suppose Mr. Gore Barton can pay for her extravagance."

"Oh ! oh ! oh !" cries poor Dora to herself.

They are not particularly rich, but still by no means poor—they have no children. Dora has a little money of her own, and has a very clever maid. She is the proudest, the most irreproachable woman in the world, and would not accept the smallest gift from anyone.

"I suppose he is one of the accomodating husbands," remarks the Hon. Dulci-

bella with her disagreeable laugh. "He cannot really be blind to the way she goes on."

"The way I go on? Good Heavens! what way?" groans Dora.

"And she is quite the most conceited person I ever met," adds the voice that with a sudden flash of intelligence Dora recognises as belonging to Mrs. Harry Walton. "When she begins to talk, no one else can get in a word edgeways, and it is always about herself."

Two lines of Burns come most unpleasantly to Dora's memory—

"Oh wad the gods the giftie gie us
To see ourselves as others see us."

"And I quite agree with Miss Skunk," the last speaker continues, "that the way she goes on with men is most objectionable."

"I don't think they care about her," responds Dulcibella, "but she throws herself so at their heads, and what can they

do, poor things? I have no doubt they laugh at her behind her back."

"Ah, my dear!" mutters Dora vindictively, "if you only knew how accurately you are describing yourself!"

"How strange!" interrupts a fresh pleasant voice. "It was only the other day little Lord Farehare was telling me she was the most charming woman in London, and I was quite looking forward to meet her."

It seems to Dora as though this compliment is the sweetest she has ever received, coming as it does after so much vituperation.

"Oh, Johnny Farehare is the most stupid little fellow," answers Dulcibella malignantly. "He thinks every woman charming who flatters him."

"Except you," murmurs Dora. "He told me the other day that he always fled when he saw the Skunk bearing down upon him."

“Who was she? Does anyone know?” asks a fat voice that belongs to Lady Saybel.

“I will let your ladyship know to-morrow,” says Dora to herself. “My pedigree will compare favourably with yours, I fancy. *My* father was not a member of the Stock Exchange with a doubtful character.”

“I think she comes from Leicestershire,” remarks some one. “Good family, but not well off.”

“I am so disappointed,” interposes the pleasant voice that Dora thinks must belong to Mrs. Gordon. “I had quite looked forward to meeting Mrs. Gore Barton, and now I am sure from what you say that I shall not like her at all.”

“Oh, she hates women!” replies Dulcibella—“she can scarcely be civil to them unless she expects to get something out of them. She toadies Lady Kyndhart awfully.”

“Grant me patience!” murmurs poor Dora.

“I don’t think,” puts in Mrs. Walton’s sneaky voice, “that you would care to be seen with her: she makes up so.”

This is too much for Dora—she gathers the skirts of her tea-gown around her, and shaking, (mentally), the dust from her pretty slippers to match, takes flight to her own room.

I am not sure whether she cries—wild visions of quitting the house at once by stealth, and explaining her reasons in a letter to Lady Kyndhart, cross her brain. Then she thinks she will plead headache and remain in her room—how can she confront these odious women?

However, Dora is blessed with a fine spirit, and is not prone to allow herself to be easily vanquished.

She has impatiently thrown off the tea-gown which she had donned with widely different feelings, wrapped herself in a

peignoir, and burying herself in an arm-chair by the fire, gives the rein to her thoughts. If you were watching her, you would at first see her straight brows drawn together in an ominous frown, her expressive mouth quivering as though she were replying to the insults that have been heaped upon her; and then, gradually, you would observe a sudden relaxing of all the features, and a very decided, if slightly malicious, smile begin to play upon them. An idea has struck her. Shall she give a *raison d'être* for the accusations of her slanderers?—shall she, putting forth all her powers of pleasing, (and without vanity, she knows they are considerable), punish Miss Dulcibella and the snaky Mrs. Walton by raising their spite and ire to the highest pitch? The idea pleases her; she feels, however, that she will have to take some one into her confidence to a certain extent—yes, happy thought, her husband entirely, Lady Kyndhart partially.

Her spirits rise—she is even tempted to execute a little war-dance of triumph which is cut short by a knock at the door.

“Come in!” and Lady Kyndhart’s portly form appears on the threshold.

“Why did you not come down, my dear?” she asks. “And oh!” looking towards the bed where the offending tea-gown reposes, “what a pretty gown! and what a pity not to show it!”

“To tell you the truth, I have been down,” confesses Dora, “and finding you were not there, I had not courage to face a party of strangers alone, and retired gracefully without betraying myself.”

“That’s quite a reproach to me. But you know, Dora, I get worn out with entertaining people, and should be fit for nothing at night if I did not go off duty for an hour or so in the afternoon. We have some natives coming to-night, and shall be twenty-two at dinner.”

“What an ordeal for me to go down alone,” says Dora.

“Come down early—then your loneliness will not be remarked.”

“Now, dear Lady Kyndhart, I am going to confide in you. But, first of all, you must promise to keep my secret and not to be shocked.”

“Oh I am wonderful at keeping secrets and never shocked ; that is unless there is really something to be shocked at. And I am quite sure,” (laying a hand affectionately on Dora’s shoulder), “that you will never inflict that sensation upon me.”

“Don’t be too sure!” laughs Dora. “On second thoughts, I shall keep the key of the enigma until the end of my visit, and in the meantime, if you see me making myself or trying to make myself extremely agreeable, not to say flirting a little, promise not to be surprised or in the least shocked.”

“Now what have you taken into your

clever little head? Some dark plot? Well! I promise, but only on one condition. You are not going to do it to vex your husband?"

"No, no, no. George is to be in the secret. I shall do nothing without his consent."

"Which I suppose you know you are sure of, for you always get your own way."

"Indeed I don't. Although George looks so sweet——"

"Ah, my dear! we know what husbands are. They are all the same more or less. Lovely to the eye of the outside world, like the apples of the Dead Sea, but——"

"Oh come, Lady Kyndhart, that's a little too hard!"

"Well, well, I suppose there is something to put up with on both sides. And so I am to be kept in darkness about your machinations for the present, you mischievous sprite. Well! I leave you to your

husband. If he does not object to your proceedings, neither will I."

"And if he does?" says Dora mischievously.

"Then beware of me. I always side with the husband."

"What, although you know them to be apples of the Dead Sea!"

"Don't tell Mr. Gore Barton I said so. *Au revoir, ma belle*," and blowing a kiss from the tips of her fingers my lady departs.

Dora rings for her maid.

"Put me out my white brocade!" she says.

"To-morrow is to be the grand dinner, Madame," remonstrates the Abigail who has acquired the information, (with a good deal more), at tea.

"Never mind!" replies her mistress. "I will wear it all the same."

As Chiffon arranges Dora's hair, she lets out by driplets little scraps of news culled

from the tea-table. Now although Dora is by no means one of those ladies who encourage the repetition of servants' hall gossip, she does not always check Chiffon's garrulity. Her maid has been with her several years, and it would hurt her feelings very much indeed not to be allowed to chatter occasionally. Oh ! ladies and gentlemen who live on scandal and are secretly proud of your capacity for retailing it—what a lesson you might learn in the servants' hall ! Why, the veriest tyro there is a past-master compared with you. You cannot realise that these obsequious retainers who serve you with such quiet zeal ; who seem to have only eyes for your nod, ears for your command, see and hear everything that is not meant for them, and proclaim on the housetop what you imagine to be the profoundest secret of your inner chamber ; you cannot conceive it possible that they can speak of you in other accents than those of mingled esteem and affec-

tion. Oh ! could you but know your sobriquet, Sir, and you yours, Madam, I almost think you would be tempted to wait upon yourselves for the remainder of your lives. Chiffon flutters like a butterfly over various little bits of news. Presently as she puts up the first coil she says,

“ Ah ! but for all the world I would not be maid to Mees Skunk. That poor girl ! her eyes were red—red as a cabbage at the tea. She is *méchante*, Mees Skunk.”

Dora cannot help smiling.

“ What had she been doing to her ?”

“ She wanted poor Marie to walk into the town, three miles there and three miles back, to buy her just one little yard of ribbon, and Marie is not strong, poor girl, and said she could not walk all that far, and then la la ! Mees calls her lazy, good-for-nothing wretch and ten thousand names beside.”

“ Amiable Dulcibella !” thinks Dora.

When her toilette is completed and she

surveys herself in the long glass, Dora feels that she has no reason to be dissatisfied with her appearance. If not a beauty, she is what some man called "quite good-looking enough for anything." Her strong point is her complexion; a point more valued even by women than men, and certainly, to-night, with a soft carmine on either cheek from sitting so long over the fire, there is no doubt a handle for the sceptical of her sex to hint at artificial resources.

"Of course they'll say I am painted when I go in," muses Dora, "but, mercifully, I always get pale at dinner, unlike you, my lady Saybel, unlike you, dear Dulcibella. I wonder what sort of woman Mrs. Temple is? Mrs. Gordon and I shall be friends, I know by the tone of her voice."

Contrary to Lady Kyndhart's suggestion, Mrs. Gore Barton elects to make her appearance in the drawing-room rather late —nearly all the guests are assembled. As

she sweeps into the room exquisitely dressed, with her head well erect, no one would imagine how tumultuously her heart is beating. Sir John greets her with effusion, and introduces her to her partner for dinner. He is a very good-looking "plunger" from the neighbouring town, and Dora is secretly thankful that the rôle she intends playing is thus made comparatively easy. Having recovered her internal composure, she proceeds to glance round the room. The eye of nearly every woman is upon her—one or two admiringly, some critically, others venomously. Amongst these of course are Mrs. Walton and the Hon. Dulcibella.

At this moment dinner is announced, and the party sweeps away into the dining-room brilliant with light and flowers. Elton Hall is noted for its chef, and all the men and some of the women seat themselves with cheerful alacrity, agreeably conscious of the pleasure to come. Dora, by no

means *gourmande*, is still alive to the attractions of an undeniable dinner, although, if she has a pleasant companion, she sometimes sends plate after plate away almost untouched.

"I can't enjoy a nice man and my dinner at the same time," she has said laughingly to her husband.

"I make it a rule never to find a woman nice until the game comes round," he answered. "You can always make up for lost time afterwards."

"You would not with me," rejoined Dora. "I form my conclusion at once about my neighbour, and if he does not begin by making himself agreeable, he never has a chance afterwards. I should sulk all dinner."

On this occasion, Dora's plunger can evidently combine two pleasures; he thoroughly enjoys his dinner and the excellent wines that accompany it, and he pays the most devoted attention to Dora who, with

the hawk-like eyes of Dulcibella fixed upon her from the opposite side of the table, gives him decided encouragement. Lady Kyndhart throws her a comical little smile and a gesture of mock reproof, which Dora answers by a radiant and mischievous glance.

In spite of the warmth and her excitement, Dora's prediction about her colour is verified—the carmine dies out of her cheeks, and her skin assumes its usual creamy whiteness. It makes a very forcible contrast to the faces of most of the guests. Dulcibella, who had been joyously confident that Dora was rouged on entering the room, is compelled, with bitter disappointment, to acknowledge her mistake to herself, though she will not fail to assert again, when she has a chance, that Mrs. Gore Barton paints herself like a clown. Her anguish is made all the more poignant by the consciousness of the heightened colour in her own face. Gladly would she think her appearance justified

her being accused of the arts which she attributes to Dora, but, alas! all her natural rouge has concentrated itself in her nose.

Presently Lady Kyndhart gives the signal of release, and the ladies sail, waddle, or stumble out, as the case may be.

(By-the-way, why is it not made part of a woman's education to enter and leave a room gracefully?)

They cluster round the fire in the big drawing-room and Lady Saybel takes the opportunity to say patronisingly to Dora,

“How d'ye do, Mrs. Gore Barton? I think we met at the De Warres.”

Dora responds with freezing politeness.

“My dear Dora,” interposes Lady Kyndhart, “what a lovely gown, and how deliciously cool you look! Why *will* dining-rooms get so hot!” and she turns to Dulcibella who would fain, like the ostrich, bury her head in the sand. Seeing her

evident discomfiture, *Lady Kyndhart* turns again to *Dora*.

“ You naughty, mischievous little thing !” she says apostrophising her, “ do you think I did not see you at dinner ? Captain Benson is an especial favourite of mine, and I am not going to allow his young affections to be trifled with. I shall tell your husband when he comes and see if I can’t make a little mischief.”

“ My dear *Lady Kyndhart*, ” responds *Dora* gaily, “ I shall be your debtor for life if you only succeed in instilling one spark of jealousy into *George*’s heart.”

The Hon. *Dulcibella* and *Mrs. Walton* exchange glances. They are not lost upon *Dora*. She approaches *Mrs. Gordon*, and presently the two are deep in conversation, having discovered that they possess many mutual acquaintances. *Dora* is a candid and sincere admirer of beauty in her own sex, and will, (contrary to *Miss Skunk*’s assertion), take as much trouble to be

pleasing to a woman she likes as to any man.

When the gentlemen join them, she becomes the centre of a little group: all the men are anxious either to claim or to make her acquaintance, and Dora, who is on her mettle, dispenses smiles and pleasant words freely. She makes a point of being very civil both to Lord Saybel and Mr. Walton, with the amiable intention of annoying their ladies. The plunger hovers about with an injured expression. There is to be some dancing presently, but first Lady Kyndhart appeals to Dora for a song. She has a charming voice, and can sing without distorting her face, (a rare art), so she wins more golden opinions, and her adversaries become every minute more dejected and wretched.

The singing is over—the dancing has commenced. The plunger is radiant—he is in the middle of his second waltz with Mrs. Gore Barton. Of course he dances

beautifully—why do soldiers, as a rule, have so much more talent in their heels than in their heads? Dora, who has a passion for dancing, is radiant with pleasure and excitement. Suddenly she is aware that her husband is standing by the door, and is watching her with a slight expression of amusement on his quiet face. She throws him a gay little nod.

“That is my husband!” she says to her partner.

He looks discomfited for a moment, but recovering himself, says with a sentimental glance,

“It must be awfully nice to be married.”

“Oh yes,” she assents laughing.

“I don’t mean for you—I mean for him,” the plunger hastens to explain.

“I don’t know,” replies Dora doubtfully. “It does not do to admit it, but I candidly think, between ourselves, that the advantages of matrimony are chiefly on the woman’s side.”

“You don’t say so! I never heard a lady confess that before.”

“When a girl marries,” replies Dora with animation, “it is the beginning of freedom and liberty for her—when a man marries it is his first experience of——”

“Slavery?” suggests Captain Benson.

“No, no, not that,” laughs Dora. “But let us say restraint, because he can no longer go here there and everywhere as he has been accustomed to do. He is obliged to take to regular habits and hours.”

“But women don’t always get their freedom,” suggests the plunger. “Sometimes the husband’s a disagreeable brute or jealous,” (inwardly hoping that Mr. Gore Barton comes under the former category).

“Fortunately my husband is everything that he ought to be,” says Dora who, if she indulges in a flirtation sometimes, is a very staunch little wife.

"Oh!" murmurs Captain Benson in a disappointed tone. "Shall we go on? we are losing all this lovely waltz."

An hour later, Dora and her husband are chatting over the fire in the seclusion of their own apartment. Dora is perched on the knee of her master, (by courtesy), and with a great felicity of diction and epithet, relieved by expressive gesture, is repeating to him the infamous calumnies of which she has been the victim.

George having consoled her by a denunciation of her foes couched in terms of manly vigour proceeds to hazard a doubt whether she has done quite the right thing in playing eaves-dropper. The feeling that she is a little guilty makes Dora very eager in self-defence.

"Now, George, how could I help it? It was the merest accident. How could I suppose for one moment they were going to talk about me?"

"But, little woman, if, the moment they

began to talk about you, you had taken flight, you would not have been subjected to the annoyance of hearing yourself maligned."

"Oh well!" answers Dora evading a direct reply, "it is just as well to be on one's guard against people."

"And if I understand your plans correctly, my dear, you intend to guard yourself against their accusations by verifying them as much as in you lies."

"But you see, Georgie dear," replies his wife coaxingly, "if the wretches could say such things about me before, they cannot say any more now."

"I don't know. I'll back Dulcibella's defamatory powers to surpass your wildest imaginings."

"But what *can* she say when you are of the party?"

"You forget that I am one of the *accommodating husbands*. I owe the honourable girl one for that."

“ Well, don’t be afraid! I shall not do anything if you object to it. I only want to make myself very agreeable to everyone, and in consequence to drive those odious creatures wild.”

“ By the way, Dora, you were making yourself very agreeable indeed to that good-looking young soldier when I came into the room.”

“ I don’t think, Georgie, that I made myself any the less so after I caught sight of you,” answers Dora mischievously.

“ That was sheer bravado on your part, my lady. However, take my advice and confine yourself to the unmarried men, and beware especially how you look at or speak to Walton, for that wife of his is the most vindictive devil that ever drew breath, and it’s not worth while making enemies ‘for fun.’ Remember, darling, the world is always ready to listen to people who have something to say against

their fellows, even if it knows the speakers to be own children to the father of lies."

"When you see me doing anything you don't approve of, tell me," says Dora sealing her injunction with a kiss.

"That is the worst of it," answers George returning her salute. "I am so easy-going that I don't disapprove very often when I know I ought to."

Next morning Madam Dora comes down to breakfast in a fresh extravagance in the shape of an exquisitely-fitting bronze velvet gown. Dulcibella and Mrs. Walton exchange significant glances—a delightful little intimacy has sprung up between them out of their hatred for Mrs. Gore Barton. Dulcibella is attired in homespun, looped up so as to display her long feet to the best advantage. How religious she ought to be, if there is any truth in an assertion I have heard, that piety and long feet always go together. Mrs. Walton is clad in a hideous Ulster, and Mrs. Gordon is,

like Dora, in velvet, looking as fresh and lovely as a rosebud.

“What! not going with us?” cries Sir John as Dora enters.

“Not going with us?” echo the other men in different keys, indicative of disappointment.

“Certainly not,” she answers gaily. “Do you suppose for one moment that all those unchivalrous articles in the papers have been lost upon me, abusing us for always thrusting our company upon you shooting, hunting, billiard-playing, smoking! Besides,” (mischievously), “I think men’s society so pleasant that I am afraid to run the risk of satiety by having too much of it.”

There is a general laugh at her sally.

“Too bad, Mrs. Gore Barton,” says the Guardsman of the party. “What business have those infernal papers to put sentiments into our mouths that we never felt or expressed? A charming woman can never

be *de trop*. What's that saying about the sex—the sharers of our pleasures and the doublers of our sorrows. No, by Jove! that's wrong somehow!" as a shout of laughter greets his mis-quotation.

"Oh! do pray come with us," says Sir John to Dora pressingly.

"Not for the world!" she answers. "I would not go out with the shooting-party on any account. I once saw a rabbit shot, and I sat down by the hedge and cried. When I tell you that, you probably will not repeat your invitation."

"How very tender-hearted you must be," sneers Mrs. Walton.

"Yes," answers Dora with a steady look at her adversary, "I am thankful to say I am. Every woman ought to be tender-hearted."

"But they're not as a rule," interposes Sir John. "For right down wanton cruelty commend me to a woman. You know the savages generally hand over their victims

to their squaws to torture, and you must confess, Mrs. Gore Barton, that your sex are far greater adepts at moral torture than ours."

"I admit and deplore it," smiles Dora.

"Then you disarm me," laughs Sir John.
"Well, but now won't you drive with us to our destination, and then return?"

"No, no; Dora is coming out with the ponies and me," interrupts Lady Kyndhart.
"Mrs. Gordon will do you the honour of occupying the box-seat, and being, like Dora and me, tender-hearted, will return with Simmonds. You two ladies"—to Mrs. Walton and Dulcibella—"propose walking home, I think?"

"Oh! yes," answers Miss Skunk friskily; "but don't expect us so soon. Thank goodness! I have no false sentimentality, and intend to stop and see a little of the sport. I am a thorough sportswoman."

And she looks round the table for support and encouragement, but fails to catch

the eye of any of the men, and so her remark falls flat. Dora and Mrs. Gordon share very equally the homage and admiration of the other sex, the beauty of the latter balancing with the former's powers of fascination—but Mrs. Gordon is fortunate enough not to excite the hatred and rivalry of the other ladies. It is a curious fact that women as a rule are not jealous of a very pretty woman, unless she personally interferes with them—all their hatred is reserved for those who, without much claim to beauty, are able to attract and fascinate men.

Lady Kyndhart and Dora go down to the hall to see the party start, and it must doubtless be very galling to Mrs. Walton and Dulcibella to hear the unanimous and loudly expressed regrets of the men who crowd round Dora on the step.

“Come, you fellows!” cries Sir John impatiently from the box. “I can’t wait for you all day. You’ll find Mrs. Gore

Barton here when you come back."

They laugh and clamber to their seats, and off goes the team down the broad drive.

"Dora, you wicked, mischievous little monkey," exclaims Lady Kyndhart as she takes her arm to mount the stairs, "what has come to you! I believe you are acting a part, for though you are always charming, I never saw you take such pains to make yourself so before."

Dora can scarcely walk upstairs for laughing.

Lady Kyndhart laughs too for sympathy.

"It is very naughty of you to monopolise the men so. You have hooked your fish—you might give poor Dulcibella a chance."

"Poor Dulcibella!" says Dora sitting down at the foot of a statue, being fairly exhausted by her mirth. "Why does she destroy her own chance by wearing short

petticoats when she is going to mount up on a coach!"

"Fortunately I don't think anyone was looking at her," responds Lady Kyndhart.

"I am in love with Mrs. Gordon," pursues Dora. "She is the prettiest, nicest woman I have met for an age."

"And she is equally taken with you. Now be quick and equip that we may be back by the time Lady Saybel and Mrs. Temple make their appearance."

At lunch, it is evidently the wish of Lady Saybel, her daughter, and Mrs. Walton to make a set against Dora and if possible to ignore her. Mrs. Temple is a delicate neutral sort of person. But Lady Kyndhart is a woman of spirit, and has no intention of seeing her favourite snubbed, and Mrs. Gordon is Dora's hearty admirer. Dora reciprocates by making herself vastly amusing and agreeable to these two, and the result is that the conspirators have to subside into sulky silence

After lunch, Dora and Mrs. Gordon walk in the grounds together and cement their friendship still further, Lady Kyndhart drives out in the barouche with Mrs. Temple, and the other three ladies assemble in conclave to revile Dora. That mischievous lady, looking in through the French windows from the terrace, conjectures their occupation and smiles to herself. It is rather amusing to know that people are abusing you as long as you cannot actually hear what they say.

The men return in time for tea, and again Dora and Mrs. Gordon are the centres of attraction. Mrs. Walton and Dulcibella, hoping to make a diversion, propose a game of billiards, and wend their way to the billiard-room, where they have the mortification of playing alone.

Dora's spirits seem perfectly inexhaustible—even her husband looks on at her with wonder and admiration, although he tells her in private that she is over-doing

it a little, and will get the character of being a "frisky matron."

That evening Mrs. Gore Barton enjoys a totally unexpected triumph. The Dowager Countess of Endor, the great lady of the neighbourhood, comes to dine at the Hall. She is an ugly, capricious old woman, but much revered as a leader of *ton*, and esteemed for her charming entertainments. For she is as excellent a hostess as she is, (in general), disagreeable a guest. She takes a vast fancy to Dora, is delighted with her singing, and monopolises her the whole evening, to the intense irritation and disgust of her admirers. Lady Saybel and her daughter, who have been dying to meet the Countess, approach her with the most abject toadyism, and are smartly snubbed for their pains. They have the agony of hearing her ladyship press Mrs. Gore Barton warmly to spend a few days at the Park when she leaves Lady Kyndhart. Unfortunately Dora is going straight

from Elton to Staffordshire, but after her husband has been appealed to, it is decided that ten days later they are to avail themselves of Lady Endor's kind invitation.

"Really, Georgie," says Dora to her husband when she has dismissed her maid, "I felt positively sorry for those poor women to-night. All my rancour is gone."

"I'll answer for it theirs is not," responds George laughing. "This is the unkindest cut of all."

The visit is drawing to a close. Mr. and Mrs. Gore Barton are to leave early the next morning, (Saturday), and are making their adieux to-night. Great are the lamentations and regrets, the hopes and promises of meeting again. Dora and Mrs. Gordon exchange cordial farewells; both are bent on continuing the acquaintance, and the Guardsman has entreated them to lunch at the Tower, declaring with fervour that no Englishwoman ought

to confess to never having seen the most interesting place in all England.

Dora retires to Lady Kyndhart's room to take a private farewell of her friend, and from the peals of laughter that issue from that apartment, it is evident that something very amusing is going on there. The fact is Dora is making the promised confession, and her hostess quite enters into the spirit of the joke.

“Between ourselves, my dear,” says her ladyship, “I am by no means enamoured of the trio: I think the infusion of new blood was a mistake. If it had not been for you, who have been the life and soul of the party, it would have been a very stupid week.”

“And you don't think I have been indiscreet?” asks Dora.

“Well,” answers my lady pursing up her lips with a little smile, “as your husband is not jealous there is no harm done,

but I think some men would not have cared to see their wives so ardently admired."

"My dear Lady Kyndhart, there can never be any harm where the woman does not mean any. And you will defend me after I am gone to-morrow."

"Trust me for that."

"I leave my character in your hands," laughs Dora, and with a hearty embrace the friends part.

Lady Kyndhart is true to her word. The ladies are all assembled in the drawing-room after breakfast the following morning. As the party is to break up at one o'clock there is no talk of walking or driving.

"How we miss Mrs. Gore Barton!" says Lady Kyndhart presently with intention. "She is a charming guest. I don't know what we should have done without her."

Mrs. Gordon responds warmly—the

other ladies are silent. But it is evident that Lady Saybel is preparing to speak. Her face deepens to a fine purple—her mouth twitches, and she assumes a high and lofty air. Her visit to Elton Hall has not been a success—she does not consider that she has been treated with the ceremony that befits her exalted rank, and she is, most of all, mortified by her daughter's want of success. She is too stout and heavy to exert herself often to speak her mind, but on this occasion she intends doing so.

“I cannot agree with you, Lady Kyndhart, in your praises of Mrs. Gore Barton. I am one of the old school, and when I see a married woman apparently forgetting that she has a husband and behaving in a manner that would be considered most reprehensible in a girl; I really consider her anything but charming. I must say I think Mrs. Gore Barton a very bold, forward person, and if I knew she were likely

to be in the same house with myself and my daughter again, I should decline to meet her."

Mrs. Walton makes a sympathetic murmur, and Dulcibella looks radiant.

Lady Kyndhart preserves her tact and temper admirably.

"I forget," she says smiling, "if Lady Endor asked you at the same time as Mrs. Gore Barton."

"No," answers Lady Saybel purpling more and more, "but if she had, I should have declined."

"Ah! that would have been a pity. For Lady Endor's parties are delightful. But," continues Lady Kyndhart gaily. "I cannot let you go away with a wrong impression of my favourite Dora, so I am going to let you all into a little secret. The evening that she arrived, I asked her to wait in my boudoir until I was ready to go in to tea," (her ladyship thinks it right to alter the colouring of the story

a little), “and as she sat there, most unfortunately some remarks that were being made in the next room forced themselves upon her ear. She heard herself traduced by ladies who only knew her either by name or very slightly, in a way that must have been most offensive and galling to any woman. I will not enter into particulars of what was said—in fact in the present company it would be unnecessary. She very soon took flight, but not before she had heard sufficient to distress and annoy her considerably. However, she has a very high spirit, and after a little reflection, she thought her best means of revenging herself would be by seeming to give some colour to the false statements which had been made about her.

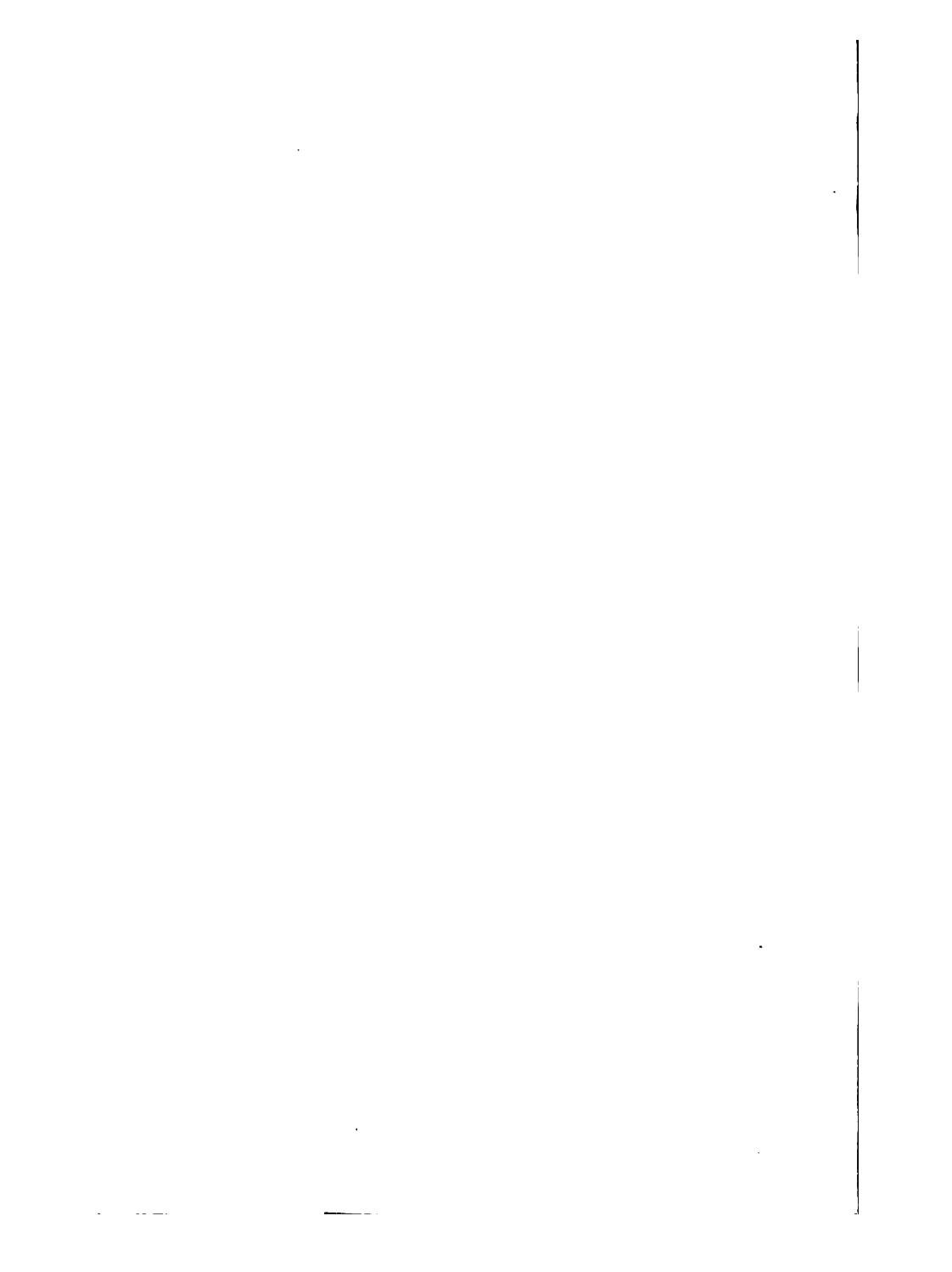
“I admit that she laid herself out most successfully to be very charming, but as she did it with her husband’s consent and approval, there is no harm done. I am in the secret, so are you now, so is Sir John,

so too will the rest of the party be or no doubt are by this time, for Sir John insists on telling the story as a capital joke, so that no one will be able to leave the house with a wrong impression of Mrs. Gore Barton, unless they do it wilfully."

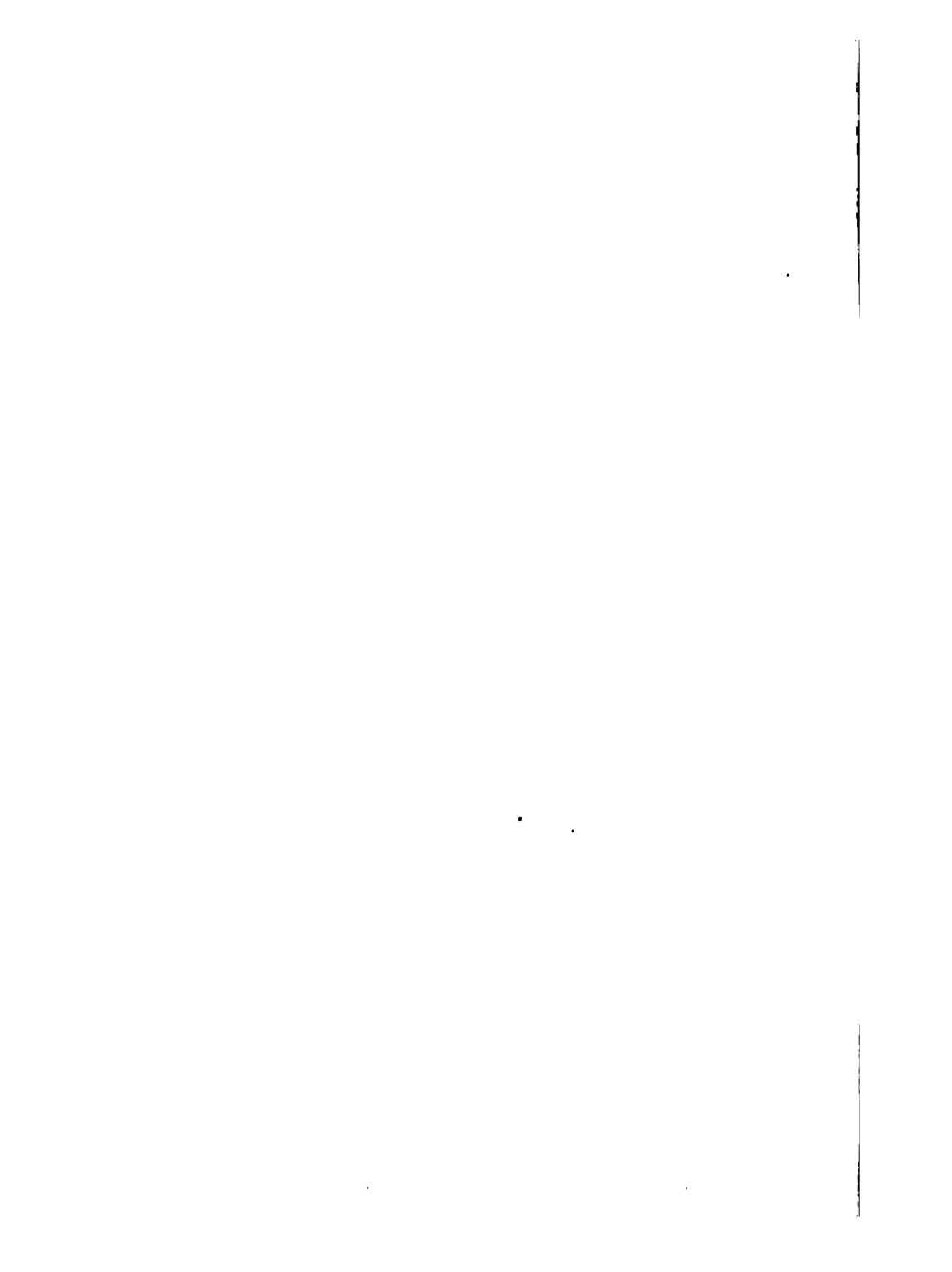
The countenances of the malignant trio are a study. Shame, disgust, mortification, spite are most vividly depicted on them. They might sit for Envy, Hatred, and Malice. Lady Saybel is crushed; Mrs. Walton essays a sickly smile. Dulcibella is the first to recover herself.

"It only shows," she says pertly, "how true the saying is that—'Listeners never hear any good of themselves.'"

"To which," replies Lady Kyndhart, still smiling, "should be appended—When the speakers are uncharitable and untruthful."



KATIE GRAY.



KATIE GRAY.

I AM tired of looking out of window down the dull street; how sick I am of these French towns! I think I would rather live in a garret in England, with the yellow fog hanging thick around the smoky panes, than go on day by day dragging out my weary existence here. I have looked out at the white houses with their wooden shutters and lace curtains till I am sick of their uniformity. I have counted dozens of stone carts on two wheels, each drawn by two white horses with blue-fringed rugs. I have seen yards and yards of bread go by in great wicker baskets. Tired am I of the tramp of

wooden sabots on the rough round stones—tired of the clean-capped women, the old-fashioned children—tired of the antics of the white poodle in the street—tired of watching the customers at the shop opposite, and of reading over for the thousandth time “Théophile Lefort, débitant, Marchand de Vins.” So I turn wearily, and come back to the round red velvet chair by the fire, studded with brass nails, with uncomfortable wooden arms, and a back that could only fit somebody with a hump, and I sigh heavily. My soul yearns for the coal fires of old England, wherein of yore I read pictures and saw faces—for the old chimney-corner where I dreamed dreams, and smiled to myself over happy conceits. The logs are damp and cheerless, the wood fire hurts my eyes.

I turn away and look at the stereotyped French prints on the wall whence “Le petit caporal” looks grimly down, at the bit of carpet with big clumsy roses, at the

velvet mantelpiece, the imitation bronze clock with a lackadaisical lady in listless pursuit of knowledge on the top, at the misty gilt-framed glass, with many a crack and flaw in its quicksilver. And oh, you little Dresden shepherd and shepherdess, eternally smiling upon each other with honied looks that never change, and hands perpetually presenting unfading flowers,—you little false pictures of false lives,—how I loathe and sicken of you! Much rather would I gaze all day long at that time-worn print hung in yonder dim corner, although it has made my heart ache many a time with old memories—that at least is true. “*Tu ne m'aimes plus*—” the poor boy kneeling at his mistress’s feet with piteous entreaty in his eyes, and she, disdainful, half turned aside, concealing a yawn.

Oh, this long, weary afternoon! will it never end? Only ten minutes past four now. Work is the universal panacea, they

say. I believe it, and yet I cannot work to-day. My listless fingers refuse occupation, my aching eyes are only fit for tears—tears, barren tears, that bring no comfort. I wish I had some one to talk to—some one to tell out my sorrow to, who would not ask me questions, nor speak to me, but only just give me one loving glance of sympathy—one kindly hand-pressure to show they heard and understood me. I, who all my life have been so shy and reticent, I long to be garrulous this afternoon. I, who have buried all my bitterness so deep down in the ground of my heart, have watered it with my tears, and let the grass grow thick upon it, to-day would undo my work—would root up the earth with my hands, unclose the coffin-lid, and bring out my grief, not decayed, not mouldered into dust, but keen, living, fresh. Can I talk to bare walls? would that comfort me? Can I take a pen and write coldly and deliberately about times whose memory

makes every nerve thrill and quiver? Who would care to read if I did—to read such an old, old story? Shall I paint a picture? bring out the old palette and paint-brushes so long put by, and paint in rainbow hues, to blur them out again with dull greys and hard black? Not I! I will put on a fresh log—the wood is dry now, and will draw up the little sofa and close my eyes.

I used to have a keen imagination. I will fancy that I am sitting in my own little chair by our bright fire in the old rectory parlour, and yonder, her white hands folded, her gentle eyes filled with tears of a divine pity, my mother sits watching me—my sainted mother dead so many years. Listen, little mother, who left me for your Father's mansion so long ago. You would not know the little one now whom you left a bright-faced child, with big grey eyes and long soft curling hair.

The eyes are dim with many tears now, little mother, and there are deep lines in

the brow and round the mouth—not laughter lines that grow about the eyes, but lines scored by pain and weariness. There are threads of white in the hair they tell me you were wont to be so proud of. I am only twenty-eight—four years younger than you when you died, and yet I look years older than that sweet picture of you that I always wear round my neck. You would not like to think you had only brought your child into the world to suffer and be sad, dear, would you? and so I will tell you first of those glad days that were so bright, so full of dancing sunshine, when the world seemed made for me, and when I could not realise a better, happier sphere than the one I lived in.

It was on my seventeenth birthday, little mother, the ninth of June—you recollect, and I went dancing over the lawn to meet Papa as he came from the churchyard. He used to go there every morning and say his prayers by your

grave, poor little mother, and then he would come sorrowfully and slowly home-wards until I met him by the gate, and then he would smile at your child, and kiss her fondly and stroke her head. Oh mother! have you found out yet why some of us poor toilers love so fondly and faithfully to our lives' end, and have the delight of our eyes taken away, whilst others who have no heart or love, only their own selfish vanity, tread smooth flowery paths, and trample on the devotion of true hearts? Is it well? Must we say, "It is well"?

This ninth of June, eleven years ago, I ran across the lawn to meet Papa, and to catch with glad ears his "Many happy re-
turns of the day, little one!" before I could get up to him. And then he put on my finger a pearl ring, saying, "Wear that, dear—it was your mother's," and his voice shook a little, and tears sprang to my eyes, more for the sake of his sadness, dear, than

for you whom I scarce remembered. But in a moment I was laughing again, as I hung on his arm, and we walked up together past the bright flower-border to the house, stopping now and then to pluck a cluster of roses from the wire arches. Then we went in to breakfast in the little morning-room, left all unchanged since you were there: with your piece of unfinished work and your fairy thimble and gold scissors under a glass-case in the corner. Ah! many a time Papa glanced at that and sighed, and then I would exert myself more than ever to be lively and cheerful, and to make him laugh at my merry conceits. Do you know, dear, I overheard them the other day speaking of me as *La triste Anglaise*. I, who was the merriest, happiest young girl in all the world. “*L'as tu jamais entendu rire?*” said Léontine, the housemaid, to the concierge, and then she put up her finger, and cried

“Chut!” as I came in through the glass-door.

How I wander off! Well, on that birthday of mine, we came in to breakfast—Papa and I. How I can see it all now—the latticed bay window thrown wide open to let in all the sweet spring sounds and scents—the red and yellow roses peering in one above the other—the clattering of the mill-wheel and the soft rush of water in the distance. Birds don’t sing here in France like they did down there in the many-tinted woods of our old home—at least, it does not seem the same to me. Perhaps my ears have grown dull to sweet sounds—maybe they are as tuneful to blithe young hearts here as once they were to me. How my thoughts dwell yearningly on the old home—that little room above all—the great china bowl filled with roses, the snowy damask cloth, the glittering silver service and old china cups, (Papa would always have them because you had

a fancy for everything handsome in that way). Oh, little mother, think of that! to have your least tastes and wishes observed so fondly, and you dead so long, whilst I, still alive, still young, am utterly forgot by one who loved, or, I should say, seemed to love me as well once.

"I met the Squire this morning, Katie," Papa said as I poured out his tea, "and when he heard it was your birthday, he said you should go up there to tea, and have strawberries and cream."

"Oh, Papa, how delicious!" I cried, clapping my hands at the bare idea of strawberries so early in the season.

"And Charlie has come home: he asked after you, too."

"I'm sorry for that," I said, "because now I shan't have Maggie all to myself. And he used to tease me so."

"Ah! but he is a young man now, and quite altered since he went to India. Let me see—he must be five and twenty at least."

Is it not odd that I should remember those trivial words so vividly, when I have lost memory of thousands I would give the world to recall. That afternoon I went up to the Hall, and Maggie and Charlie came down through the park to meet me. How surprised I was to see him ! He who years ago had been the fear and torment of our lives, grown into such a fine, handsome gentleman, with the quietest, most courteous of manners.

“ May I call you Katie still ?” he asked smiling, as he took my hand. Fancy *his* asking that who had been wont to call me Kit, kittens, little cat, spit-fire, pussums, and anything else he thought fit, without by your leave or with your leave.

“ Oh, yes,” I stammered, half inclined to call him sir.

“ And you will call me Charlie, of course ?”

“ Oh ! I don’t think I could,” I cried confused ; and then Maggie laughed, and

asked him why he didn't kiss me as he used to, and I blushed scarlet, and almost wished the earth would open and swallow me.

Oh, little mother, those dear old happy days, too far off even to leave a shadow, those sounds of pealing laughter, the bare echo of which has died away so long ago ! Why don't we all die when we are young and happy, before our garlands are withered by the hot sun, or nipped by the frosts of winter !

We used to be together every day—Charlie and Maggie and I—and soon I grew not to have any thought but about him. His manner was so tender and caressing. When I glanced at him, his eyes always looked in mine so fondly. When we met and parted, his hand held mine in a lingering pressure. Why need I describe the old, old language of love ? —it is not so long ago that you have forgotten, mother mine. Oh, how pure, how

fresh, how beautiful, is the love that springs in young hearts untainted by passion, selfishness, or desire! Ah, how we alter in the after years—not all of us, but some!

One day he came and met me alone, and we walked together all up the long winding path to the Hall, hardly speaking, lingering as much as we could, dreading the turn that would bring us in sight of the house. He stopped by the last white gate and leaned against it, without attempting to unfasten it.

“I wish we were going to walk a thousand miles together, Katie,” he said, pulling down the grey felt hat half over his brown eyes, and looking out keenly at me from beneath it.

“So do I,” I answered eagerly, too young to dissemble, the honest truth flashing from my eyes and lips.

“Do you, you darling?” came the quick response. “Then what’s to hinder us go-

ing through all our lives together?" and he took me in his arms and kissed me until all the blood rushed from my heart, and my brain reeled so that I could not stand alone.

It was all settled that evening that Charlie and I should be married, but oh ! not for a long, long time ; we did not wish it, at least I did not. Papa said I was too young, and Mr. Calvert agreed, though I do not think he was displeased at the idea of his son marrying me in spite of his being much grander and richer than we. Oh mother ! why did they not let us marry then, when we loved each other so dearly ? If I had been his wife, I would have been the slave to his every wish, I would have been so devoted that he must perforce have gone on loving me. I need have had no false pride then to keep me from falling on my knees and beseeching him to give her up for me.

One day in the winter, as I was indulg-

ing a day-dream over the fire in the twilight, the door opened and Charlie came in. I stirred the fire into a blaze, and the flame leaped up, leaped up as my heart at sight of his handsome face and stalwart frame.

“ Such a bore, little kitten,” he said, kissing me; “ we have visitors coming to the hall next week. They won’t have much of my company though, I can tell them.”

“ Oh Charlie! visitors?—who?”

“ Mrs. Pelham and her daughter, my father’s ward.”

“ Have you seen them?”

“ Not the girl, and I hardly recollect Mrs. Pelham, she has been abroad for years. Maggie is delighted at the idea.”

“ Is Maggie so fond of new faces?” I asked a little jealously.

“ Not that, darling, but you and I have hardly been much company for her the last three months, have we now?”

“Of course, dear, I was only jesting, but will they stay *very* long?”

“Three weeks was the time Mrs. Pelham mentioned, and my father is quite agreeable, for she was always a favourite of his. But I shall slip down here, Katie, except in the evenings; of course they'll make every excuse for an engaged man, and you must come up to the Hall instead.”

“What is Miss Pelham like?” I asked.

“Not particularly handsome, I believe, but very fascinating. They say she is never happy unless she makes every man she meets in love with her.”

“Oh Charlie!” and my heart failed me.

“You dear little jealous kitten, don't put up your back already. As if the loveliest woman alive could shake my allegiance to you! Why you are the very dearest thing in the world. I don't believe if the far-famed serpent of old Nile could come to life she would turn away one thought of mine from you.”

“ Oh Charlie ! really ?”

“ Yes, really, you darling. But I am forgetting my father’s message. You are to come up on Tuesday and meet them at dinner, and the rector too.”

My heart was full of misgivings. I had not sufficient confidence in myself to feel secure of my own power, and I loved him so dearly, ah ! so dearly, little mother, the thought of losing him was death to me.

“ Wear your white dress and a pink rose in your hair,” Charlie whispered to me the day we were to dine at the Hall.

“ A pink rose, sir ? you forget we have no winter garden at the rectory.”

“ Well, then, little kitten, the beast shall get one for beauty. I saw a perfect gem in the conservatory, and will send it to Maggie’s room.”

I never used to spend very long at my toilette, but that night I did, and never, I thought, with a less satisfactory result.

My cheeks were pale ; I trembled with nervousness. You little dowdy thing, I said angrily to my reflection in the mirror. At the Hall I found the loveliest pink rose awaiting me, but alas ! in my tremulous eagerness to arrange it, I snapt the stalk off short, and it would not stay amongst the soft limp masses of my hair. I think I could have cried with vexation, if I had not been ashamed. Then, trembling, I followed Maggie to the drawing-room. It was brilliantly lighted, and a bright fire blazed in the chimney, throwing a glory of brightness over the masses of gilding and amber draperies—the most disadvantageous background in the world for me—a golden picture-frame for my rival. Yes, I felt that at the first glance ; how could it be otherwise ? I remember her so well that evening as I entered reclining languidly in a low amber fauteuil, her face all but her splendid eyes shaded from the fire by a large black fan. She dropped it

slowly, as I came towards the group, but did not stir from her position.

“This is Katie,” said Mr. Calvert, coming forward and kissing me. “Yolande, this is Charlie’s *fiancée*.”

Then she rose and put out one slender hand covered with jewels, and smiled. It seemed to me as if there was a tinge of disdain in her well-bred, courteous manner, not an atom of warmth certainly. Let me paint her picture for you, little mother. Tall, slender, graceful, with a queenly carriage and a proudly turned head. Her features were not regular, but she had a bright complexion, and a more varying expression than anyone else I ever saw. She wore a black velvet dress, cut square and trimmed with point lace, and in her dark hair a cluster of scarlet pomegranates—I understood at once why Charlie wanted me to wear white and pink that evening. Was it my over-sensitiveness, or did I detect a shade of disappointment

on his handsome face as he saw us standing side by side in the full blaze of the wax-lights ?

How I watched her all that evening ! "Yolande," I murmured to myself ; the name seemed strange to me, but it was musical. One moment I said to myself, " She is beautiful," the next I thought her hardly handsome. She was not restless, but her expression seemed to change constantly ; that is what men admire so much, I suppose. One moment she was pensive, then merry, then arch, then caressing, then disdainful—all by turns, and nothing long. I saw Charlie watching her with a kind of half-fascinated attention, but yet as if he hardly liked her.

" Charlie !" I whispered anxiously, as he came to my side after dinner, " do you admire her very much ? "

" No, darling. I can fancy some men being crazy about her, but she is not the sort of woman I care for."

“I can fancy some men being crazy about her,” I repeated to myself many a time afterwards, and then a wild longing to be worshipped surged up in my heart. No, that was not for me. I could never have learnt the pretty airs and coquettish ways that men find so charming. I could not have caressed and flattered and piqued them by turns, and loved, or seem to love, half a dozen in quick succession. No, I could only love dearly and faithfully, and love once my whole life through. I watched Miss Pelham keenly, and I saw how charming she made herself to every one. She was full of tact, and knew how to interest and flatter each. She seemed to read their thoughts—to divine at once what was nearest to every one’s heart. I could see how charmed Mr. Calvert was with her—how Maggie watched her with undisguised admiration; even Papa brightened up when she talked to him, and looked more eager and interested than I

had ever seen him look before. She scarcely spoke to or noticed Charlie—if she did, it was with a pretty little appealing manner, as if apologising for intruding herself on some one to whom she had no right. At dinner she led the conversation ; afterwards she sang so sweetly that we all listened enthralled, the tears coming into our eyes, and when she rose from the piano, stately, with glistening eyes, her neck curved in the imperious, disdainful manner peculiarly her own, and a smile of conscious power on her lips, I trembled and shivered. For myself, I was silent, weighed upon with heaviness ; deeply, painfully conscious of my own inferiority. I scarcely spoke ; never in my life I felt had I been so utterly unattractive, and an agonizing fear filled me that Charlie thought so too.

Even I was fascinated by Yolande Pelham ; intensely as I feared her, I could not hate her, not then at least. God forgive

me all the passionate anger of heart I have felt for her since! Day by day I watched her as the poor trembling bird watches the snake. Papa used to say I was a wonderful judge of character for a young girl, and I think I read hers through. You would have thought, little mother, she possessed a passionate impulsive nature, her red, full mouth and splendid eyes seemed to hide volumes of suppressed fire. She had that open steadfast gaze you could not have helped but believe her true and honest, and yet that was all false, mother, a lie written on a fair page. She was as cold and self-contained as ice. She could simulate every feeling, every passion, that makes men worship a woman and yet keep the most perfect mastery over herself. *She* never knew what it was to feel love; she only cared for power and the vanity of making men her slaves; they must come at her beck and call, fetch and carry for her like a dog, and when she had done

with them she cast them off like an old glove. And you would have believed her, and men did believe her, the softest, gentlest, most loveable creature in the world ; as dependent on them as a child, as loving, as trusting as the purest, most tender-hearted woman God ever made. Oh mother ! why is falseness allowed to triumph like that ? why is mere selfish vanity permitted to reign supreme, whilst faithful loving hearts are despised and contemned ?

There were unusual festivities at the Hall during the month that the Pelhams stayed there, and Yolande made the conquest of every man who came. They all hung over her chair, flattered her, sought her society, and she had smiles for them all ; her eyes were bright for each in turn, her voice low and caressing. I was always there too ; as a matter of course I was invited, and I could not keep away. Charlie came very seldom to the Rectory ; after the first ten days there was always some

excuse; when he did, his manner was listless and he had little to say. And I—I was silent too; my heart was full. I dared not speak lest he should hear the tears in my voice. Oh, Charlie! when I think now, to-day, how I loved you, how my heart was torn with anguish as I saw your love slipping slowly, surely away from me, my eyes rain tears, my voice is broken by sobs. Oh, my darling! my darling! if you could only have known how true and faithful my heart would always be to you, would you have cared so much more for bright eyes and a brilliant wit than the love that would never have failed you till your life's end or mine?

At the Hall, I, watching breathlessly, my very soul in my eyes, saw him growing restless, moody, miserable when Yolande talked with other men; saw him brighten and soften when she turned to him, and then I saw her let her maddening eyes, (I felt they were maddening to men), dwell

yearningly, lingeringly upon him, and fall slowly, sadly, consciously away, and she would sigh a little low sigh, then a smouldering stifled fire would blaze up suddenly in his face. Then I hated her—oh God! how I hated her.

“Do I weary you, little mother, sitting there so patiently, your hands still folded, your eyes still wet with a divine pity—I am coming to the end now.”

It was one afternoon in February, a clear cold day, with a bright sky. I had been expecting Charlie; he had promised to come down and fetch me; but Maggie came instead. We sat together for some time, and then I fetched my hat to go with her up to the Hall. It was almost dark when we reached the door.

“Go into the drawing-room, Katie,” she said. “I want to see Stevens; I will be with you directly.” The door was ajar and I entered. The room was nearly dark, and I went up to the fireplace and

put one foot on the fender. Suddenly I started—I was not alone—the sound of voices came from behind the half-drawn curtains that covered the embrasure of the window.

“Yolande! I must go away, I cannot bear this torture any longer. It drives me mad to see other men looking into your eyes, and you smiling at them.”

“That is strange, when you yourself are engaged.”

The words were cold in themselves, but the voice that uttered them was so low and thrilling, even I felt deep down in my failing heart the effect they were intended to produce.

“I know I am a blackguard,” came the quick response. “I loathe and despise myself. She is the dearest, best little creature in the world, but oh Yolande! I believe you are a witch, a fiend—something more than human—you turn the blood in my veins to fire; I am almost

mad when I look into your eyes or touch your hand."

"Do you love me then so much?" My heart stood still until the answer came in a deep concentrated voice.

"So much, that if I might have you in my arms this minute, I would pray that we might both die, that no other man might ever hold you so again!"

Sick, faint, staggering, I crawled from the room, and then as I felt the keen cold air blow against my cheek, I fled out into the darkness and home to the old Rectory. Oh, that night, that night!—should I forget it if I lived on for ever like Tithonus? Thank God, the lives which are so bitter are but a span! Is it wrong to say that? Oh, how often, how often have I longed for the end! longed passionately and vainly.

Papa was away from home. All the next day I sat in a stupor over the fire;

then, late in the afternoon, the door opened and Charlie came in. He came up to kiss me as usual, but I shrank away, not because I felt bitter or angry, but because I knew it was an effort to him now he no longer loved me.

“Katie,” he said, and at the sound of his voice all strength left me, and I burst into bitter crying. “Katie,” he said again softly, “poor little girl! what is it?”

Was it unmaidenly, was it wanting in pride? Oh! what had I to do with pride when he was life or death to me? I laid my head on his breast, sobbing like the poorest, sorrowfulest little child, and I moaned out—

“Charlie, *don't* you love me any longer?”

I felt his quick start, and then he put both arms round me and kissed me, but answered nothing.

“I know it all,” I said, lying quite still, for I knew it was the last time my head

would ever be pillow'd there. "I heard you tell *her* you would like to die with her in your arms."

"Oh! child, forgive me," he cried in a broken voice: "I was mad, I did not know what I was saying."

"Forgive you?" I said mechanically; "oh yes, I forgive you. It was a mistake all through. I was not good enough for you, a poor little country-bred girl like me."

"Don't, Katie!" he cried with a stifled sob in his throat.

"I am not clever, not beautiful, only I loved you so; I would have laid down my life for you."

"Katie darling, only forgive me," he groaned; "I will never see her again."

"Yes," I said slowly and painfully, forcing out the words, "you will see her to-night, you will tell her you are free, and then you will take her in your arms and forget Katie Gray as if she were dead and buried

in the churchyard with her mother." How could I say those words? why did they come into my mind then? I don't know, but I remember saying them so well.

"Don't talk like that, little Katie, it is not like you."

"Good-bye, Charlie," and I raised my head. "I shall never see you again."

"Katie, do you mean all to be at an end between us?" he asked stupefied.

"Yes."

"You cast me off?"

"Yes."

"For ever?"

"Yes."

"Kate, are you trifling with me? are you trying to punish me? If you are, tell me, and I will do all in my power to atone to you for the wrong I have done. Give me your last answer now. I swear to take it as final; if you give me up, I go for ever."

For a moment I hesitated, looking up

in his face, but it was turned from me. If I had read a sign of love or tenderness there I would have thrown myself back in his arms and said—"Only stay with me, don't break my heart." But he kept his face averted. Surely even then he might have heard the tears in my voice when I answered him that last time.

"I am not trifling with you. I am not trying to punish you. God knows your happiness is my dearest wish, but I shall never be anything more to you now."

"Good-bye, then," he said coldly turning away.

My wistful eyes followed him blind with unshed tears. I cried out after him as the door closed upon his retreating form, but he did not hear, and then I fell to the earth prone, lifeless, and forgot my pain and the anguish of my heart. So Papa found me when he returned home, and his was the first eager, anxious face I saw when I came back to life.

Oh, little mother, I cannot go on telling you about that miserable time when your poor child's heart broke, when she watered her pillow with salt tears, and dragged out the lonely hours of her sorrow. I begged Papa to let me go away, and he sent me to London to his sister for a month. Poor Papa ! I am afraid I was selfish. I knew he would miss his little Kate ; but I should have gone mad had I stopped there just then. Before I went I sent for Maggie. She came, and bent her dear face over me wet with tears.

“ Oh, Katie, I am so grieved.”

“ Will you promise me something, Maggie ?”

“ Anything, dear.”

“ Will you always let me know everything that happens to Charlie ? If—if he is going to marry *her*—if he loves her, if she cares for him. You need not be afraid of hurting me, only tell me everything. Oh, Maggie !” and I broke down piteously;

“she won’t love him like I did.” And then we cried on each other’s necks, and Maggie gave me her faithful promise to do as I asked her.

I had an indignant letter from her in London. Yolande had refused Charlie because Sir George Avon had been in the neighbourhood, and had paid her great attention. For a moment I breathed again. He will come back to my faithful heart, I said to myself; but he never came. He was infatuated about Miss Pelham. When the baronet went away without proposing to her, he asked her again to marry him, and she consented. Maggie was a faithful chronicler, though she loved me. Charlie was bewitched, she said. Yolande wound him round her fingers—he worshipped her more like a goddess than a woman. Then she flirted with some one else; he was mad with jealousy, and the engagement was broken off.

Will he come back to me? I said anxiously in my heart, for you see, mother, I had no pride where he was concerned; but I waited in vain, and then at last I heard they were married. And he is so miserable—so miserable! Ah! how my heart has bled for him, for she is indifferent to his love, and fonder of admiration than ever, and he is still fascinated, still torn in two between love and jealousy. Oh, little mother, why are those wicked, selfish women loved so passionately, and we, who would lay down our lives, thrown aside unvalued? Say, little mother, it is not so in your world, is it, darling?

That is the end of my story—a very old, very hackneyed one, isn't it? I never told it to anyone before—no one else would have cared to hear it—only a mother feels that intense divine sympathy for her child's sorrow. The curious gaze coldly, the worldling sneers, the thoughtless laugh. Love is out of date, they say, and the

frivolity, the selfishness, the self-seeking we meet everywhere seem somehow to bear out the truth of that hard saying. But oh! it cannot be true. If the world is getting wicked and indifferent, there must be some pure faithful hearts, some true honest lives left in it. Say, mother!

* * * * *

Have I been dreaming all this time? The room is dark, the fire out, my hands and feet are cold as ice. Did I shed those tears, wet upon my cheek? What a glare in at the window! Ah, I remember that is the lamp over M. Lefort's shop-door. It is a wet night; there goes one of those blessed Sœurs de Charité. Ah, fie upon my selfishness! Is there not something to live for? are there no aching hearts to weep with, no sorrows to be relieved, no joys to be shared? Ah, Katie, forget yourself; go out into the world, and sow the good seed that you may gather it in with your bitter harvest. If you can

bring a smile to cheeks wan with weeping
—if you can scatter a gleam of brightness
where now is thickest gloom, will you not
find that flowers still bloom here and there
along the rugged pathway to a better land,
and that God's sun shines down on those
who carry their life-long cross with a brave
heart and an unsoured temper?

JUNO AND PHILLIS.

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PART I.

I.

A WIDE green lawn shaded by rich branching cedars, by dark clumps of beeches, and splendid, broad-leaved chestnuts—a terrace with parterres of gorgeous-hued flowers where, on the broad balustrade, a magnificent peacock spreads his Argus eyes in the glowing sunlight—a handsome stone mansion with a square tower. And yonder sits the fair châtelaine. Half reclined in a luxurious chair, the trailing silk and lace of her dress sweeping the turf, she casts her magnificent eyes sometimes over her fair possessions,

sometimes down on her white jewelled fingers, and more seldom still on the open book lying in her lap. A servant comes presently across the grass.

“I beg your pardon, my lady, but the young person is here.”

“Very well. I will come,” his beautiful mistress makes answer; and in the tone of those few words one reads at once perfect refinement—perfect repose.

She waits a few moments as though to finish some train of thought a vulgar communication from the outer world had broken in upon. Then she rises, full of languid grace, and moves with lingering steps across the lawn—

“A daughter of the gods, divinely tall,
And most divinely fair.”

In face, in form, in gait, there is stamped such pride, such a grand scorn, a conscious majesty, as great Hera herself had scarce surpassed. She pauses a moment before the window; then, with one

glance of superb disdain, she enters and confronts her rival. Her rival? Yes, this slender girl with the soft white skin, the blue eyes and simply twisted knot of golden hair, this girl attired in a humble cotton gown, is the rival of an imperial beauty robed in the purple, and wearing the majesty of rank and breeding on her splendid brows. Juno and Phillis have met at last. Passing strange, that between such a pair there should be rivalry! Would you not say that the man who could fall adoring before the shrine of this queenly pride and beauty would reck little of an innocent simple child, with wistful eyes, and only her stedfast faith and purity for dower. The one must be to a man something to protect, to fondle, to cherish; for the other he must count the world well lost.

II.

LADY HELEN DUNDAS was the daughter of

an impoverished Irish earl, who in his young days had squandered with splendid selfishness his patrimony, flashing with meteoric rapidity through the great world of fashion. With ruined health and fortunes, an ailing, discontented wife, and one child—a daughter—he betook himself to continental life, and visited alternately those cities of refuge where the impecunious may flee when their own country becomes too hot to hold them.

Lady Helen grew up amongst scenes strangely bitter to her imperious pride. She craved to take her own place in that El Doradian world which her injudicious mother was never weary of lamenting in her ears, and chafed like a chained eagle at this disreputable Bohemian life. But her father, being wrapped in a garment of utter selfishness, was profoundly indifferent to the comfort or welfare of any but the one adored self. He had become used to continental living; the brightness, the

languid *far niente*, the cheap luxuries, suited him infinitely better than a struggling, shameful poverty in England, an agonized attempt to keep his head above water amongst a proud set who had long ago forgotten what he had been, and would only regard him now with supercilious indifference.

And had he not known that life? plumb-ed it with the plumb-line of youth, strength, and credit—sounded its depths and shoals, been stranded on the reefs of luxurious folly and extravagance, and engulfed at last in the quicksands of satiety and ruin? It was unfortunate for Helen, certainly, “but we all have our cross to bear,” murmured the Earl, with well-bred resignation, as he sipped his coffee and chasse, and listened to the brilliant strains of the band that played in the pretty gardens of the Kursaal.

Lady Helen, dreaming of diamonds, of position and power, clenched her taper

fingers, and let the great tears roll down upon her poor faded silk, feeling fiercely resentful at being ogled by admiring *petit maîtres*, or, worse still, by British snobs. Longing for London or Paris, she loathed all the petty cities where her young life was spent. She would tread with impatient steps the white glaring Geneva pavement, and stand angrily on the wooden bridges, looking down at the rushing blue waters of the Rhone, or the calm sapphire Leman. The sweet country drives, the visits to spots hallowed by the memories of great men, the sight of Mont Blanc, rosy tinted in the sunset, gave her no pleasure, filled her with no admiration. She detested the French watering places, with their expanse of shining sand, their cloudless blue skies and picturesque fishermen and women. She abhorred still more the homely German towns, full of ugly Fraus with plaited hair; but most of all she detested the false glitter, the

trumpery shams of the gambling places.

At last they went to Rome, and here she grew a shade more contented. There was a little society, actually people with whom they could mix; and at Rome she met Mr. Dundas, a man of sixty, well-bred, of good family, and rich. Rich? yes, rich! And, oh! the music of that word in Lady Helen's ears! He proposed for the hand of this splendid young Juno, with the magnificent eyes and shabby dress, and was accepted at once with effusion. Did she care for him? was she won by the first tender of love that had fallen to her dull lot? By no means. Mr. Dundas was not fascinating, did not look a day younger than his twelve lustres; was, in fact, five years older than his *fiancée's* father, and had a bad constitution. Ah! but he had ten thousand a year, all of which he could leave to his bride if he were minded so to do; an *entrée* into the best society, and was not that sufficient to buy five feet

six inches of beautiful womanhood, a pair of lustrous eyes, a mouth carved like Cupid's bow, and an imperial *tour-nure*.

Lady Helen, at all events, was perfectly satisfied with the bargain, and fulfilled her share of it by entertaining her husband's friends, attiring herself in the most magnificent and costly apparel, and creating a perfect *furore* in London. That was precisely what Mr. Dundas desired, but he paid the price of his life in a year, for two seasons of triumph and unceasing gaiety. Well, dying was the most complaisant action the good old gentleman ever performed, and I am sure his lovely widow appreciated it thoroughly. At two and twenty she flashed again upon the world, like some bright star, received homage and adulation enough to have contented an empress, and enjoyed it to the full. When my story opens, she was recruiting, at her country seat, from the

fatigues and pleasures of the London season.

III.

LADY HELEN had promised to herself a month of rest and quiet before commencing her round of country-house visiting ; she had looked forward to this time of leisure with fancied enjoyment ; had bethought herself of green lanes, of shaded gardens, of wild canters across the common, and drives through the sheltered beechen and nut avenues. But three days—three summer days—passed only, when the imperial beauty's heart chafed for “some men to govern in this wood,” and she felt a strange craving after that homage which had wearied her just a little when it was so freely—so incessantly bestowed. And there was a new want in her life,—a want that grew and increased daily, spreading itself into every fibre, every vein, until it engrossed her waking and sleeping

thoughts—the desire to love. Was it not passing strange that this strong nature—passionate, proud, wilful, exacting—should never yet have felt any power superior to her own—never have known how it was possible for a woman to soften and tremble, to fear, to doubt herself even, in that divine happiness which, even at its greatest height, can never lose Psyche's poisoned drop of doubt? Lady Helen had never loved, never felt aught but a passing fancy : the more men loved her, so much the more capricious, exacting, and supercilious she became. It pleased her well that she could torture them with vain longing, that her smiles could raise them into happiness, her frowns make them unutterably miserable—that they would have given up everything in the world for her sake ; but that did not touch her heart ; it only fanned the flame of her intense pride.

The fourth day after her arrival in the country, there came a visitor to Annesly

Court—came riding up the long avenue, a handsome stranger, golden-haired, blue-eyed, stalwart. Lady Helen was sitting beneath the shadow of the great chestnuts, and thither, across the soft green sward, he came to her. She rose slowly as he approached, with her own languid grace, seeming to his eyes a queen by right divine.

“ I must introduce myself, Lady Helen,” he said, “ since, although I am your nearest neighbour, I have never been so fortunate as to meet you before. My name is Lambart—Fulke Lambart.”

“ Sir Fulke Lambart? How glad I am to see you at last.”

Lady Helen’s voice had an habitually caressing tone when she spoke to men, that flattered them subtly, imperceptibly; that gained her more slaves even than her beauty.

“ I only heard yesterday that you were at Annesly Court.”

“ I came four days since, congratulating myself upon shaking off the trammels of society, and full of ardent aspirations after pastoral enjoyments ; and already my short experience has wearied me, and I hail the advent of some one from the outer world with delight.”

“ How glad I am to have chosen such an opportune moment for my first visit. We hear so much of first impressions, and perhaps, since circumstances have so far favoured me, you may be tempted to let me use the privilege of such near neighbourhood, and come often to see you.”

“ I accept the challenge at once,” laughed Lady Helen in her silver tones. “ I shall always be glad to see you. Now tell me why you were not in town this season.”

“ To tell the truth, Lady Helen, I do not care very much for London seasons, and a better reason still was that a hundred and one affairs connected with the property

kept me at Ashleigh. You know, when poor Sir Giles died, I was with my regiment in India, and could not sell out for some little time. On my return, six months ago, I found things had been badly managed and a great deal neglected, and, of course, when such is the case, there is nothing like personal supervision."

"But how have you amused yourself? Every one has been away until this month. Perhaps, though, you don't feel women's society necessary to your existence?" remarked Lady Helen, lifting her dark eyes slowly to Sir Fulke's handsome face: a slight flush there, a certain expression of embarrassment puzzled her, and she thought petulantly: "I trust he is not going to be married; that would be too provoking, now I have only him to count on for amusement during the next three weeks."

"A long dearth makes one all the more

appreciative," he answered softly, looking at his beautiful neighbour with a glance of undisguised admiration.

"After my long isolation I fancy myself suddenly transported to Olympus. The illusion is complete," he added smiling, as the peacock, his magnificent tail outspread, came strutting across the lawn.

"I see you have not forgotten the ways of the civilised world in your persistent retirement," laughed Lady Helen. "Your pretty compliment does honour to both head and heart."

"Then let my heart have all the credit," was the gallant reply. Somehow men could never resist making love to the proud beauty as long as they were with her. The afternoon wore away so swiftly and pleasantly that neither noted how it passed until the shadows had left the grass, and the red reflected light shone upon the lower branches of the great chestnuts, and faces of Sir Fulke and Lady Helen.

It might have been a scene enacted long ago in Arcadia in the golden age—this picture, where, on the green sward, amongst the crimson flush of roses, the sunlight falling on their handsome faces, and the broad luxuriance of ancient trees forming a grand background, stood those two, on whom the great godmother Nature had lavished her best gifts. Lady Helen's hand was in Sir Fulke's. He held it a moment longer than courtesy demanded; regret was in his eyes, a subtle languor in hers.

“I may come again soon?” he asked in a low voice.

“Do come,” she answered softly. “I shall always be glad to see you.”

He turned and left her, crossing the grass to the house; then he mounted his horse and rode slowly down the broad avenue. But the spell was broken now that the eyes of the enchantress no longer lingered on him; the smile left Sir Fulke's

handsome mouth, a frown deepened on his brows, and, putting spurs to his horse, he rode home fast in the twilight.

IV.

NEARLY six months before, Sir Fulke, coming fresh from active service, having seen nothing for a long time of womankind, had fallen in love with pretty Dorothy Wilde. In the years that were past, he had tasted the sweets of all the gay world calls pleasure to the core; now he hardly cared to go back to it, but when his uncle died, and he inherited the fine property, rather pictured to himself the delights of pastoral life, and the comfort and dignity of seigneurship over the broad acres of Ashleigh. But he soon found that there was a great deal of real work to be done before he could enter upon this *otium cum dignitate*; affairs had been mismanaged, his rents were by no means satisfactory, and he had very strong sus-

pitions of knavery on the part of the head steward and bailiff. So he began to look into things himself, and gave notice that he would attend to all business matters, and receive applications personally. One morning as he sat in the oak wainscoted library, a petitioner was brought to him in the shape of a slim graceful girl, with golden hair and very wistful, frightened blue eyes.

“I beg your pardon, my lord,” she began, trembling so that she could scarcely stand.

Sir Fulke rose with quick courtesy, and placed a chair for his unwilling visitor.

“Tell me what I can do for you,” he said kindly; “don’t be afraid to ask anything.”

It is odd how easily men’s hearts are melted, and how considerate they become to a lovely woman in distress. But this great and unexpected condescension on the

part of the grand seigneur, whose majesty had seemed so awful in the eyes of pretty Dorothy, disconcerted her more than ever, and she felt a foolish inclination to cry.

“I hope, my lord,” she began with an exceeding tremulousness of voice—“I hope you will not think I want to impose upon your kindness. I will work day and night to pay it—I will, indeed.”

“I am sure you shall do no such thing if I can help it,” exclaimed Sir Fulke with a keen glance of admiration at the pretty, troubled face. “But come, tell me all about it, or shall I guess? You are a little behindhand with the rent.”

“Indeed, my lord, it never happened before; but my mother has been dangerously ill, and the doctor ordered nourishing things, and work has been scarce. All the ladies are gone away to London, and I do not earn so much from the farmers’ wives.”

“You shall pay me when you like and

when you can," interrupted Sir Fulke kindly. "I know my poor uncle was not a very harsh landlord, and I may venture to say you shall not be worse off for the change. Where do you live?"

"Rose Cottage, if you please, my lord."

"And where is that?"

"The last house in the village, sir; at least the first from here."

Sir Fulke would have been well content to prolong the interview with his lovely tenant, but she hastened to quit the presence that was still awful to her, and retired, possessed by a gratitude that seemed quite disproportionate to the young man.

That morning he made many inquiries of his housekeeper relative to Dorothy Wilde, and had no difficulty in eliciting her history from the good-natured, garrulous old woman. She was the daughter of the organist, who had died three years previously. Her mother, a most respectable person, had been bedridden almost

ever since, and Dorothy worked at dress-making for the ladies and farmers' wives about. She was most superior, Mrs. Hawes said, and such a good daughter. It was her (Mrs. Hawes') belief that the poor girl lived on a dry crust sometimes to get wine and things for her sick mother.

Sir Fulke was horror-stricken.

“Send them off some wine at once, Hawes,” he exclaimed, “and some—I don’t know what things sick people fancy, you know—and hem—couldn’t you—I should think you might find some work for the girl to do here. It doesn’t matter about it wanting to be done, only just to let the poor thing earn a little money; and, look here, mind you pay her well.”

“Should I give her one and ninepence a day, sir?” interrogated Hawes.

“Good heavens!” cried the young man aghast. “One and ninepence a day?”

“She mostly gets one and sixpence a day and her beer.”

Sir Fulke stood petrified at the idea of this lovely creature working her fingers to the bone for one and sixpence a day and her beer. He was about to burst out with, “Give her five shillings, ten, a sovereign a day if you like,” but as it suddenly occurred to him that such conduct might arouse the suspicions of honest Hawes, he forbore to make the remark, and merely said, “Give her what you like; only be as liberal as you can without seeming to do her a favour.”

Somehow, after this, the young Squire happened to meet Dorothy very often, sometimes in the lanes, sometimes coming through the park, or near the village. Dorothy began to lose that excess of awe which had overcome her at their first meeting, and to leave off calling him my lord. She wondered now how she could ever have felt so terrified at those kind handsome eyes. She did not know anything about heathen mythology, so she

could not compare him to Adonis or Apollo, or any of the Olympian gods ; could not think of his curling yellow hair as Hyperion locks, or his brow as Jove-like ; and, not being *au fait* with the light literature of the present day, could not be reminded by him of heroes, deep-chested and thin-flanked with columnar throats. Ah, but if she had known it all, he could not have been more splendid, more of a hero in her eyes than he was now. That foolish little heart was growing to have but one thought, one great longing ; the thought was of the last time she saw that glorious face, the longing was for the next time she would hear the deep voice, and see the glad tender smile again. And Strephon thought he would never tire of watching this pretty Phillis amongst the sylvan glades, though he was not quite sure that he would like things to continue exactly as they were now. He could not reconcile himself to the Lord of Burleigh's idea, but

she was such a dear, innocent little darling that—but why have any thoughts about the future when the present was so charming? But ever since Eve ate the apple, or Pandora looked into the box, things can't go on pleasantly just in the same way for any length of time together, and, not having the benefit of our experience, Sir Fulke and Dorothy had to find this out for themselves.

On one of the bright June evenings, so long and full of sunshine that it deceived the birds into staying up until unheard-of hours, Phillis came lingeringly along the green path which led through the Ashleigh woods. There was scarce a cloud in the sky, scarce a breath of air to ripple the leaves; the slanting yellow sunlight came pouring through every opening in the spreading branches, shining across the grass, upon the wild strawberries nestling in the bank, the blue Veronica, the golden Celadine, and the bold foxglove; shining, too, on Dorothy's bright hair as she pulled off

the broad-brimmed hat and let it dangle by one string from her fingers. About this time—*by accident*—Sir Fulke comes wandering along from the opposite direction, and presently the lord of the manor and his fair tenant meet at the stile.

“How do you do, Miss Dorothy?” says Sir Fulke extending his hand, and Phillis puts her small fingers shyly into it—shyly, but not at all as though overpowered by the condescension.

“I have not seen you for three whole days,” says Mars looking at the village maiden with some complaining in his eyes, “and I have been here every evening.”

“I was working for the housekeeper at Annesly Court. She is getting the house in order for Lady Helen.”

“What a shame such pretty little fingers should ever have to do any work!” says Sir Fulke looking down at the hand he still detains with gentle force in his strong grasp.

“Oh ! I shouldn’t be happy at all without,” responds Dorothy simply ; “you can’t think how dreadful it is to have nothing to do all day, sir.”

“Can’t I, Miss Dorothy ?” says the young man with an amused smile in his eyes. “I’m afraid I ought to have a profound conviction of the dreadfulness of being idle, if personal experience counts for anything. I suppose you believe in Watts, when he says—

“‘For Satan finds some mischief still
For idle hands to do’ ?”

“Yes, sir, I’m sure it’s true for poor people, but then, of course, it’s different for gentlefolks.”

“Is Watts your favourite poet ?” asks Sir Fulke still smiling.

Dorothy responds by an arch glance.

“I’m afraid I’m not so fond of him as I ought to be, sir.”

“Oh, Dorothy !” breaks in the young man suddenly, “don’t keep calling me sir.

And I wish you'd let me call you Dolly—it's such an awfully pretty name, and you are just one of those dear little helpless creatures it suits."

The vivid scarlet comes flushing over poor Dorothy's cheek and brow, and she says with some confusion :

"Please, Sir—Sir Fulke, I think, if you won't be offended, I'd rather you didn't."

"Of course I won't be offended," he says coming a little nearer, and looking down into the shy, blue eyes, "but won't you really let me, Dorothy? Am I too bold?"

There is as much pleading in his tone as if he were asking some great favour of a queen, Dorothy thinks, and she becomes more shy and confused than ever, divided between the fear of refusing and her sense of the proprieties.

She looks so bewitching in her shamed perplexity that Sir Fulke, utterly forgetting everything but her pretty innocent face for a moment, stoops suddenly, puts

his arm round her, and kisses the sweet rosebud mouth. She springs from him with hot, flushing cheeks, the great angry tears welling into her eyes, and stands panting, but wordless, in her indignation.

“Oh, Dorothy!” exclaims Sir Fulke penitently, “I am so sorry. I couldn’t help it.”

“What have I done to make you think so of me?” bursts out poor Dorothy with sudden passion. “I thought you were a gentleman.” And she turns to go, with streaming eyes.

“I beg your pardon, Miss Dorothy,” cries the young man, quite dismayed at the consequence of his imprudence. “I swear I never had a thought of insulting you.”

“I ought to have known a poor seamstress was no company for a fine gentleman,” says Dorothy with bitterness.

“Nay, Miss Dorothy, if you say such

things, it is you who are unkind," Sir Fulke answers, and with many words and protestations he at last pacifies her, and she goes away home.

But she is still bitter at heart, and comes no more for rambles in the Ashleigh woods, nor takes the road through the lanes to the village; and Sir Fulke, awaiting her impatiently evening after evening, seeing she comes not, chafes at her absence, and is furious. At last he begins to see that he loves her—cannot live without her; he discovers that she is capable of being made a perfect lady, is a woman any man might be proud to call wife, and, presently, comes to the conclusion that the Lord of Burleigh wasn't such a fool after all. He says to himself that these innocent simple maidens are the truest type of womanhood—that in country life, such as he means to lead to the end of his days, a man does not want an accomplished fine-lady wife; in short, this young man makes reason utterly subservi-

ent to desire, and behaves pretty much as men in love have always done since the first great decadence of the race. So it came to pass that, finding no occupation for his idle hands, he took the idea of making a lady of pretty Dorothy, and proceeded to carry it into execution by proposing marriage to the little village maiden.

Ah ! what a glimpse of Paradise those heaven-blue eyes caught when the grand seigneur, who had seemed so immeasurably far above her, came and asked her, quite simply, to be his wife ! But she besought him that it should not be known just yet, that for a little while things might continue as they were ; she should go on tending her sick mother and working for the people about. Dorothy was very shy ; she could not bear to be lifted up as a mark for all the eyes and tongues of the village just at once. Sir Fulke consented, at last, to the soft pleading—consented a little un-

graciously, and with manifest impatience.

Thus matters stood when the master of Ashleigh paid his first visit to his beautiful neighbour at Annesly Court, and it was a certain vague regret at having allowed himself to be so dazzled by her fascinations that made him put spurs to his horse and ride so impatiently back to Ashleigh. Lady Helen was beautiful, charming in conversation, perfect in culture and refinement, a woman to adore, to go mad about, at least for some men, but for him she was too much a woman of the world, and he preferred the charms of innocence and simplicity. They were not so stirring to the blood, perhaps, but oh, much more lasting, more satisfying in the long run ! How on earth was it he couldn't get Cleopatra out of his head?—certainly he was not coveting for himself the rôle of Mark Antony. He would not go to the Court again for some time: those dazzling women were apt to unsettle men's feelings, although

their influence was only transient. And so, riding homewards in the twilight, Sir Fulke made many virtuous and sensible resolves.

V.

LADY HELEN did not go in at once after her handsome visitor had departed, but sat under the chestnuts, with thoughtful brow, a well-pleased smile parting her curved lips. She would be able to endure life at the Court for three more weeks, since this meeting had revived her flagging interest in pastoral pleasures. Sir Fulke Lambart was very handsome; how she liked that tawny yellow hair, the bold blue eyes and stalwart frame. There was some pleasure in subduing these great strong men: she would enjoy his playing Hercules to her Omphale, and of course he *would* fall desperately in love with her. Then Lady Helen went in to dinner, and was more

affable and communicative to her middle-aged companion than was her wont.

The next evening she mounted her horse and rode towards the Ashleigh woods. She was well pleased when she caught sight of Sir Fulke on horseback too, coming towards her. She reined in her steed and greeted him with laughing eyes, but his manner seemed changed since yesterday, his salutation was almost cold, and he did not offer to join her in her ride. When they parted, an angry flush overspread the fair Amazon's cheeks, and a dangerous light came into her eyes. She was piqued in earnest: a new feeling crossed her breast for this man who slighted her. She had deigned to choose him for her slave, and he showed no sign of pleasure or even acquiescence in her choice.

An hour later, returning the same way, she saw in the distance Sir Fulke dismounted, holding his horse by the bridle,

standing to talk with a slim fair-haired girl. There was a side path in the lane, and Lady Helen turned sharply into it, her heart swelling with anger and her pearl-white teeth clenched in the pouting under lip. This, then, was the secret of his indifference ! but the proud beauty did not choose to be balked so. The following morning she despatched a groom to Ashleigh with a note asking Sir Fulke to dine at the Court that evening. The answer came. Sir Fulke greatly regretted that an engagement would prevent his having the honour of dining with Lady Helen. Believing he purposely avoided her, she was furious.

She rode out as usual in the cool of the evening, and this time took her way across the common and beyond the village. Her heart was full of anger and discontent. She rode moodily along, unknowing how to wage her warfare further. Soon she turned her horse, and came slowly back

through the village and into the green shady lanes. This was not a frequented path; the grass had grown all over it, even in the two great cart-ruts that gave the only sign of traffic. There came a turning in the lane, and Lady Helen suddenly drew herself erect, with a haughty flush on her proud face, as a *tableau vivant* met her eyes—the living impersonation of Faust and Marguerite. Faust was bending slightly over his yellow-haired Gretchen with the modest downcast eyes, and the glowing sunlight shed its ruddy warmth over that vivid picture of keen young life. Marguerite held no daisy, plucking its leaves to count, he loves me—loves me not—nay, that seemed just now assured beyond all assurance; but in her breast was a great white rose amongst the knot of blue ribbons.

A mad sickening anger came into Lady Helen's heart as she was forced to pass Sir Fulke and his village inammorata.

To turn back would be an avowal of her bitter pique, and she passed them with an indifferent salutation to Faust. The colour deepened on his handsome face ; he felt indescribably provoked that Lady Helen should have seen him thus, more especially since he had declined her invitation. Juno rode homewards, half maddened by the insult she had received, and feeling an impotent desire for revenge. She scarcely uttered a word during the dreary dinner ; in vain her companion sought to find conversation. Mrs. Horne was a well-meaning woman, utterly devoid of tact, very much in awe of Lady Helen.

“I am sure you must find it very dull here, after being used to so much society,” she ventures presently.

“No, I do not,” is the icy response. “Perhaps you judge me by your own experience.”

“Oh, no, Lady Helen, I assure you ! I am quite fond of the country, and enjoy a

garden beyond everything. Only I think people who are used to much gaiety feel quite lost somehow, and that makes them get into mischief."

"Get into mischief?" repeats Juno, opening her splendid eyes in astonishment, and thereby disconcerting her unhappy vis-à-vis.

"Of course, I was thinking of gentlemen," she says in dire confusion; "indeed, I was reminded of it by hearing about Sir Fulke Lambart."

"What of him?" interrogates Juno haughtily.

"It does seem a great pity—such a handsome young man, too—to be thrown away like that."

Juno feels a sudden chill creeping over her.

"You speak in riddles," she exclaims impatiently.

"Mrs. Jessop told me," says the companion hurriedly, "Sir Fulke is actually

engaged to be married to a dressmaker in the village.

“To be married?” repeats Juno with a scornful curl of the lip.

“Yes; there is no doubt it’s true: he has asked her to marry him, and makes no secret of it. They are often about together.”

This then was the explanation of the living picture in the golden setting. Pity there should be no Mephistopheles to complete the scene. Some great believer in unseen spirits might well have conjectured his presence now lurking softly behind Lady Helen’s chair.

Lady Helen was not a good woman, not tender-hearted nor pitiful. Pride and jealousy exercised their cruel sway over her, making her bitter and hard against anyone who dared dispute her power. Why could she not leave this poor little village maiden to her dream of bliss? what wanted she with Sir Fulke, she who could

count half a score of lovers richer and better born? But the thought that she, who had been a queen even amongst the beauties in London, should be slighted for the sake of this rustic Gretchen, maddened her, and made her feel merciless towards her unconscious rival. War to the knife! And *après*? When she had conquered—for she *would* conquer—what was to be done with Sir Fulke?

Juno took for her motto, *Væ victis!*

PART II.

I.

SOMEHOW after Lady Helen had passed, like “great Hera with her angry eyes,” the pleasure of the July evening seemed gone for Faust and Marguerite. Faust became silent and pre-occupied: he left off bending to look into the blue eyes, and stood, with folded arms and moody brow, leaning against the rustic stile. Innocent

Marguerite, with a vague sense of some cloud having overcast the fair heaven from which all her sun-rays came, yet unsuspicuous of the truth, cast a wistful glance at her handsome lover. Presently he roused himself.

“ It is time to be turning homewards ; ” and love, which, if he be blind, is yet so quick to hear, noted that the inflexion of his voice was less soft than its wont.

Sir Fulke was vexed—vexed that he had refused Lady Helen’s invitation ; more vexed still that she should have cause to consider herself insulted by his refusal. He was a fool to have come out at all this evening : he might have known there was a risk of meeting her, and, after all, the pleasure had not been worth the danger he had incurred. He could see Dorothy any day : she was a dear, sweet little thing ; but . . . he might have been talking at that very moment to Lady Helen, whose conversation was so charming, and

looking, perhaps, into those splendid eyes. It was very nice for a simple little girl like Dolly to have coy, shy eyes that always looked away; but there was certainly a great fascination in the proud, unflinching orbs that met you every time you spoke. Sir Fulke told himself that he was in duty bound to call at Annesly Court the next day, and explain to its fair mistress how he really had a business engagement at nine o'clock the previous evening, and then he resolved, with a deepening flush on his sunburnt face, to tell Lady Helen of his engagement to Dorothy.

As he rode up the avenue he felt a strange trepidation. Would the beauty be too angry to see him, or would she flash upon him with pointed sarcasms and polished sneers, such as the angry fair sometimes make weapons of? But none of these terrors which he was arming himself to meet came upon him: he was ushered at once into the long, low morn-

ing-room, draped with pale blue, where Lady Helen sat, toying with her pugs, by the open window. She did not rise to meet him, but held out her delicate hand, with a sweet, soft smile in her eyes. He flushed and stammered a little, forgetting half he had meant to say, and feeling dimly conscious that a serious explanation of what she did not even appear to have noticed would be a great mistake. She saw his confusion with secret triumph.

“I was afraid,” he began.

“Afraid of what?” she asked softly.

“Afraid you might not quite understand —might think my plea of a business engagement was—was —”

“Was what?” she asked a little wonderingly.

“Was—was, perhaps, only an excuse.”

“An excuse? I? Nay, Sir Fulke,” continued Lady Helen with a flash of laughter in her handsome eyes, “you strangely misjudge me. Perhaps my

vanity needs correction, but my experience has never yet taught me that anyone would voluntarily give up my society without a very adequate reason. But, to change the subject, you have no idea what a charming tableau you made with your pretty little peasant acquaintance last night—a perfect study for a new picture of Faust and Marguerite."

Sir Fulke coloured and moved uneasily on his chair: this was the very time to tell Lady Helen about Dorothy. He paused a moment, and she adroitly changed the conversation. After that it was impossible, and he resigned himself utterly to the charm of the hour. She worked upon him with every spell, every enchantment she was mistress of, and he was losing his head fast. To sit there talking to her, looking at her, winning those lovely eyes to his, seemed to him the intoxication of pleasure. Her love would be like strong wine, making fire in the veins, just as poor

little Dolly's was like a draught of pure spring water. Men who are cold and self-contained see and appreciate the wholesomeness of the latter, but Sir Fulke hadn't taken the pledge. Lady Helen did not choose that he should stay too long to-day; her first step was to pique him, and presently she said:

“I must be so rude as to run away. I am going for my ride.”

“May I not stay and go with you?” he pleaded.

“Not to-day,” she smiled, without assigning any reason.

“Lady Helen, you will think me very bold: I am going to ask a great favour of you.”

“I promise to grant it,” she said softly.

“Will you invite me, once more, to be your guest?”

“Yes; to-morrow—next week—when you will.”

This was courteously, but almost indifferently spoken.

“To-morrow, then,” and he took her hand with a lingering pressure, but she scarcely looked at him.

He rode away enchanted, furious, piqued, fascinated—I know not what. And Juno followed him for a moment with her eyes, a light of ineffable scorn and triumph shining in their liquid depths.

II.

Poor Dorothy! Little thought had her well-born lover of her simple charms in those days that followed. A mad, wild worship of beautiful Lady Helen surged through his veins; he even shrank from seeing the girl he had promised to marry. The recollection that this splendid woman, with her lovely passionate eyes, could be nothing to him now, was intolerable. Thus matters stood when, all unknowing, Dorothy came for the first time face to face with imperious Lady Helen. The

mistress of Annesly Court had sent for her under some pretext of having a dress altered, and, with great trepidation, Dorothy obeyed the summons. When Lady Helen entered the room through the French window, the village maiden almost wished the earth would open and swallow her, but presently she became reassured. It seemed nothing strange to her that the great lady's manner should be disdainful and imperious ; she had always heard, and believed, that scornful pride was natural to aristocrats. Had she not, at first, been afraid of her own Sir Fulke ? But ah ! with how little reason in his case !

Lady Helen, watching from under her broad eyelids how awkward and ill-at-ease Dorothy appeared, curved her lips in scorn and smiled to herself. This was no very dangerous rival, after all ; this shy, simple girl in the cotton gown, with frightened blue eyes and knot of golden hair. Her very defencelessness might have stirred

some sort of compassion in the breast of the woman of the world, had it been a gentler, kindlier one. What chance had an artless child of nature like this, with only her poor alphabet of love and trust, against a lovely woman, patrician born, with every accomplishment, every fascination the refined world prizes, at her fingers' ends. Great Juno herself was not more implacable against a rival than Lady Helen, and so she formed her cruel plans remorselessly. Could she not spare this one? A dozen handsome, well-bred men were at her command, and she was not in love—not actually in love with Sir Fulke.

There was only one room at the Court which overlooked the rose-garden, one small room rarely used, and there Lady Helen commanded that the seamstress was to work. Her mandate was obeyed without question, but it caused some surprise and speculation in the housekeeper's room.

Dorothy had been working steadily all the July afternoon, but now the heat made her drowsy ; the languor of coming evening, the heavy scent of roses through the open window, stole over her, and she closed her eyes. The fair head bent over her lace-work, and Phillis was away in dream-land. Sweet dreams, in which her head seemed to rest on Sir Fulke's shoulder, while he murmured loving words into her ear. Gradually his voice sank to a whisper —a whisper of pleading tones, only audible now and again, and then another voice seemed to mingle with it—a voice full of low mocking laughter. Dorothy awoke with a start. Had she been asleep ? The whole sky was lit up with a glory of golden wave-clouds, the air was heavy with perfume, and low voices were wafted towards her as she had heard them in her dream. The faint colour came into her cheeks as she caught Sir Fulke's voice. Rising, she walked on tiptoe to the window and looked

out from behind the shelter of the lace curtains. She stood for a moment, a fuller crimson flushing to her cheeks, and then the light died out of face and eyes, and she staggered back against the wall, uttering a gasping sigh. But presently, like a child fascinated against its will by some deadly snake, she turned to look again. Sir Fulke and Lady Helen were pacing side by side along the green lawn; he was bending over her with passionate admiration written in every line of his handsome face, a look such as Dorothy knew full well had never been turned upon her. There was a mocking light in the imperial beauty's languid eyes, but ever and anon she shot a slow upward glance at him that seemed to say, "I love you!" A sickening sense of helpless despair came into Dorothy's heart; she put one hand to her side, and leaned her head on the other against the wall.

"How could I ever think myself fit to mate with a fine gentleman! Oh, Fulke,

Fulke!" she wailed piteously. Then she looked out once more. They were standing now, that splendid pair, by a rose-tree which bent beneath its wealth of crimson flowers. He was asking her to give him one. Dorothy caught the words—

"Ah, one rose—
One rose, but one, by those fair fingers cull'd,
Were worth a hundred kisses press'd on lips
Less exquisite than thine."

Poor child! she did not know it was only a quotation. She had never heard of Tennyson, and, for aught she knew, great ladies and gentlemen always talked in poetry. She took, not the sense of the words, but their literal meaning. All those fond kisses he had pressed on her lips were forgotten then, were as nothing compared to this simple favour he besought of Lady Helen. Dorothy watched with dilated eyes to see the great boon granted. The beauty stood for a moment with a tantalizing gesture, as if irresolute; then

she plucked a deep red bud, and held it towards him in her dainty fingers. He took the flower and hand together, pressing a thousand kisses on them. She did not draw away, but shot one glance of her dangerous eyes into his. Dorothy saw no more ; she sat as if in a trance, and when she looked again they were gone. Perhaps they were dining now. Sir Fulke had been in evening dress. Then there was no hope of seeing him to-night.

Vague, shadowy thoughts of what she would do crossed the girl's mind ; wild purposes chased each other over her maddened brain, through all of which she felt her utter, miserable impotency. She would reproach Sir Fulke bitterly, fling back his love—alas ! it was no longer hers to give back ; she would see Lady Helen face to face, and tell her she was bad and wicked—but stay, if the great lady knew nothing of Sir Fulke's engagement, how then ? Ah ! there was another resource—she

would creep away somewhere to die, and no one would ever hear of her again. But her mother, her poor crippled mother, who depended on her for everything? because she was sore hurt and grieved, should she visit her pain on one who had never sinned against her? No! if it was so that her splendid lover cared no more for her, she must put on a brave face, and hide her misery in her own breast. Dorothy tied on her bonnet with trembling fingers, and crept out of the house by a back way. She felt she must see Sir Fulke once, to hear from his own lips if it were true that he no longer cared for her; but it was no use to wait to-night; it might be hours, long hours, before he left the Court, and her mother would grow uneasy. With a heavy heart she walked along the lanes in the darkening twilight, having no strong arm on which to lean, no thoughts of him to bear her loneliness company as she had had in the days that were gone. To have

sorrow in the present, and no hope in the future—ah! how unspeakably bitter. Once she made an effort to rally her shaken faith. After all, she might have little real cause for fear; the ways of grand people were different from simple villagers; it might only have meant that he admired Lady Helen, not that he was in love with her. If she dared to reproach him, might he not be angered, and oh, how terrible to see Sir Fulke displeased with her! After a long struggle she resolved to wait until he sought her, and to complete in patience the work that had been set her at the Court.

III.

LADY HELEN saw the wan face on the morrow after the scene in the rose-garden, and had no pity. Handsome Sir Fulke was hers now, heart, mind, and soul. Well, the month was nearly up. She had

amused herself, and in a few days, when she had proved her power a little more upon him, he might go back to his blue-eyed Gretchen. Just at first, when there had been some doubt of him, she had thought it possible she might come to be in love with her Saxon neighbour, but, once at her feet, the spell was broken, his power gone for ever. She hardly expected to see him again the next day, but he came late in the afternoon, and was ushered to her presence in the rose-garden. Dorothy saw the meeting—noted, with bitterness of heart, that he still wore in his coat the rose Lady Helen had given him. His manner was more impassioned to-day ; his eyes more eager. The poor child who watched him saw that he scarcely ever glanced away from the proud face beside him ; and inexperienced, all unversed in reading faces as she was, Dorothy felt that her rival was playing a part, that she did not really love Sir Fulke as—as he loved

her. Ah ! he was not in play ; it was all real unfeigned earnest with him : and the poor little girl, after the wont of her sex, pitied and forgave him, and hated his temptress. She took a resolve ; she could not bear this bitter pain longer ; from his own lips she must hear the truth. And when after hours, that seemed centuries of torment to her, he bade Lady Helen a lingering farewell, she crept softly down-stairs and out into the park. She flew rather than ran down the side path that met the road he must take. Unless he was on horseback, and riding fast, she must meet him. Dorothy waited, leaning against the trunk of an old elm, flushed and panting from excitement and her quick pace. Presently he came in sight, riding slowly, thoughtfully along on his favourite chestnut. He started as he saw her, and a frown of vexation crossed his brow.

“ Dorothy ! you here, and with no hat ! You look half wild.”

It was the first time the intonation of his voice had ever been impatient or angry to her, and she felt it keenly.

“Oh, Fulke! Sir Fulke! I could not help it.”

The rosy mouth quivered, big tears trembled on the upturned lashes, and Sir Fulke saw there was going to be a scene. Men always hate a scene unless they are desperately in love with the fair cause, and then they can be strangely tolerant. When a man says petulantly, “Oh, for God’s sake, don’t let us have a scene!” a woman may be sure that her power, if not altogether gone, is very far on the wane.

Sir Fulke did not make the exclamation in so many words, but he jerked his rein and looked annoyed.

“I—I saw you in the garden with Lady Helen to-day and yesterday, and I know you don’t care about me any more. Oh, Fulke! is it true? don’t you care for me any longer?”

He was petrified at the news that she had seen him.

“Dorothy,” he said gravely, “I should hardly have believed you guilty of playing the spy.”

“I did not mean to. How could I help it? I was put to work in the room that looks into the garden. I daresay she meant me to see,” cried poor Dorothy passionately.

“Stop!” said Sir Fulke coldly. “Pray leave Lady Helen out of the question. You forget that your thoughts and actions cannot be of the slightest moment to her.” It was the first he had ever used his grand seigneur manner to Dorothy, but she was too miserable to be awed by it. She burst into a passion of tears, and hid her face in the horse’s neck. The faithful creature knew her touch so well; he stood quite still, only half turning his proud head as if in sympathy.

“Of course it’s nothing to her,” gasped

Dorothy choking with sobs ; “she’s a—a—grand lady, and I’m on—only a common country girl, that she—she looks down upon.”

Sir Fulke dismounted.

“Come, come, Dorothy,” he said in a soothing voice, “you have taken some foolish fancy into your head. I don’t know what you saw, but you—you don’t quite understand the ways—of——”

“Grand folks ; no, I don’t !” cried the girl bitterly. “I—I don’t want to, if they’re so—so false and cruel.”

Sir Fulke began to be a little wearied. Now that he had dropped the rôle of Strephon this scene jarred upon his feelings. He quite meant to give up the peasant maiden, as Lady Helen had called her, but he did not want to break with her too suddenly ; it hurt his grand seignorial pride to do anything mean or ungenerous. No, he meant to behave handsomely, and kindly too, if possible.

“This is folly,” he said, a shadow of vexation crossing his broad forehead.

“It may be folly to you, sir,” uttered Dorothy, her voice still choked by sobs; “it’s none to me. I didn’t put myself in your way; you came to me freely of your own accord, and—and made me love you. And then you see a grand lady who’s fit to mate with you, and you don’t care no more for me; and she—she’s playing with you; I know it by her eyes.”

This was too much for Sir Fulke; he grew very angry.

“Of course,” he said sternly, “if you mean to behave in this foolish manner, it will be much better that all should be at an end between us. You cannot see that by asking you to be my wife, I was making a great sacrifice of my pride. If I had not loved you, I should hardly have done it.”

Dorothy raised the great blue eyes wistfully to his face. The big tears glittered

in them, and her mouth quivered and trembled.

“Oh! Sir Fulke, if you only tell me now—I know you won’t deceive me—if you *would* only tell me that I haven’t any cause to doubt you, that you do love me true and faithful still, just as you did before, I’ll never say another word, but go back home as happy and light of heart as I was before I saw her.”

This was worse than ever; not at all what Sir Fulke wanted. She must be made to understand that all was over between them. He was hopelessly in love with Lady Helen. If he could not win her, he would have no other. But being a brave man, and having a great deal of nobility in his nature, to play a mean and cruel part was horribly painful to him. His brows were knitted in perplexity, and he looked away as he answered slowly:

“If I were to say I feel the same for you as I did, it would not be the truth.”

Poor Dorothy's head was bent over the chestnut, and great tears rolled off his shining coat to the ground. Sir Fulke put his hand on her. She flung it off indignantly, and turned upon him with more pride than he had believed the little village girl capable of.

"I understand you, sir," she cried hotly. "You needn't fear any trouble from me. You're a gentleman; I'm a common girl. It's only right you should have amused yourself with me, and then flung me out of the way when you was tired."

"Oh! Dorothy, don't talk like that!" cried the young man feeling a sudden and great compunction arise within him. "I will do anything for you—anything in the world; I will always be your friend."

"You'll never be any more to me," answered Dorothy with bitter emphasis. "I wouldn't have a crust from you to save me from starving. I won't be called a lord's castaway. I've earned my bread all my

life ; please God, I'll earn it a little longer till I die."

She turned away from him with a choking sob, and went up into the woods away out of his sight. He mounted his horse, and rode back to Ashleigh, his heart full of shame and anger. His conscience accused him bitterly for this wrong done to a helpless girl ; it made his self-reproach far keener that he saw she would accept nothing from him. He had thought before in his heart, with that injustice the rich so often do the poor : "I will make it up to her ; she shall have no cause to say I have behaved badly." Perhaps she had spoken in the heat of the moment, and something might still be done.

Then he banished forcibly the thought of the girl he had forsaken, and let his mind dwell on all the beauties and graces of Lady Helen. Would she marry him ? did she love him ? Surely she was too proud to deceive a man with feigned love ?

could he not read her thoughts in her eyes ? What a fool he had been to imagine that a simple country girl with a pretty face and trustful eyes could ever have contented him ! How sorely he would have repented his mistake when he had gone again into the world, and met the well-bred, refined women of his own set ! But this suspense was intolerable to him ; he *must* know whether there was hope or not. In his heart of hearts he believed himself beloved.

Two days after the meeting with Dorothy he betook himself to see the fair mistress of Annesly Court, murmuring to himself as he went :

“ He either fears his fate too much,
Or his desert is small,
Who fears to put it to the touch,
And win or lose it all.”

IV.

BEAUTIFUL Lady Helen reclined under the

cedars with an air of wearied restlessness. In her lap lay a delicate note, on which was a ducal coronet surmounting an undecipherable monogram.

“ Five days—only five days,” murmured Juno, “ and I shall be at Chambryène, with a Duke at my feet, and as many handsome men in my train as I care to count. Shall I accept him, I wonder? Bah! a dissolute boy of twenty-three, with low tastes, and a short thickset figure such as I abhor. Am I not well enough as I am?—free to as much adoration and worship as I choose to accept? Only that it is something to be a Duchess; only that with the Orme coronet upon my brows I might become the first leader of *ton* in the country. Ah, well! time will show; and, meantime, I wish my handsome tawny lion here would come to relieve the tedium of these weary summer afternoons. I wonder if anyone finds a charm in the country itself, the country *pur et simple*, without any adventitious aids

of society and amusement? Oh! how tired I am of it! Will I ever trust myself amongst the sylvan glades, the rural groves, the dryads' haunts, that are the cant phrases of crack-brained poetasters, again, without good company to make it endurable? Never! *Que fais-je dans cette galère!* Anticipation, retrospect, are alike unavailable for passing one of these tedious hours. Oh! spirits of the earth and air, I invoke you to chase away this insufferable dulness, and bring me something to amuse the passing hour!"

And obedient to the queen of heaven's behest, the willing sprites complied, and brought handsome Sir Fulke striding across the lawn to their mistress's feet!

"There is still power in enchantment," laughed Lady Helen softly, as she stretched out her slender hand to him without moving from her graceful posture. "Tell me, Sir Fulke, were you just now half a score of miles away when some

geni picked you up, like Prince Camaralzaman, and transported you hither in the twinkling of an eye?"

" You are pleased to speak in riddles," smiled Sir Fulke, looking at her as if he could never drink in enough of her magnificent beauty. Her eyes did not droop beneath his ardent gaze, as most women's would have done ; they met the look softly, with a lingering provocative glance that made it tantalizing for him to stand at a courteous distance, uttering polite common-places.

" A moment ago you were in my thoughts," murmured Lady Helen with a low laugh, " and I bade my attendant sprites go summon you to relieve the tedium of this intolerable afternoon. See how they obey ! Now I have discovered my power over you, I shall use it mercilessly. I shall make you stay dinner, and keep you here until the fairies are dancing in their magic ring by moonlight."

All this gay nonsense was most sweetly musical in Sir Fulke's ears. Oh! the vast difference between listening to this and the unimaginative, nay! sometimes ungrammatical common-places of poor little plebeian Dorothy. He was going to spend all these delicious hours with his beauty—then he would control his impatience, and not put his fate to the touch now. No, later on, when they were wandering side by side in the moonlit rose-garden, or he sat at her feet, perhaps, in that dimly-lighted paradise, looking down on the green lawn, then he would tell her of his wild worship, and she would perchance make her soft confession in return. The bare thought sent a hot thrill through his veins; intoxicated by the dream, he scarcely heard her low voice whispering to him. In a kind of trance he sat beside her until the sun was gone from the heavens, and they were summoned in by the sound of the gong. Mechanically he ate, and uttered half a dozen common-places

to the elderly *dame de compagnie* who played the unenviable rôle of third. He was thinking all the while of that delicious by-and-by that was so slow to come. Daylight was gone, the silver lamps, rose-shaded, shed their glow upon the costly fruits lying daintily in their shining silver and crystal dishes, and Lady Helen, drawing her lace around her, rose from the table.

“I shall make predictions for to-morrow from the stars,” she said as she stepped from the open window on the terrace.

“Tell me my fate,” he whispered, following her—the discreet chaperon had vanished.

Lady Helen was perfectly self-possessed under all circumstances, but for the moment she felt a vague uneasiness at his tone. It was but for a moment; then she said in her heart, while a keen light flashed in her eyes:

“*Allons!* it is the perfection of a night for a good love scene.”

Sir Fulke felt no inclination to make a common-place declaration. There was something in the witching hour that made a glance half divined, a touch of trembling fingers a thousand times more eloquent than words. She understood why he cared for this entranced silence; it was a sweet, keen triumph to her. She sailed along the soft grass, brushing with her trailing lace the light dew that began to fall, under the broad avenues and through the rose-garden, he following like her shadow the while. They came to the open window of my lady's bower, where in one dim recess stood a screened lamp. He put out his hand to help her cross the little step, and with that touch the spell was broken—silence dissolved. Lady Helen sunk into the low chair that stood by the window in a full flood of moonlight, and Sir Fulke threw himself down beside her, kissing the hand passionately that he still held. His eyes looked up into hers, his mouth work-

ed and quivered, while the beautiful temptress felt a sudden thrill of fear at her own work—a faint misgiving whether these great strong men were safe toys.

“ Oh, Helen ! I love you so,” he whispered in low eager tones.

She looked away for a moment, with a troubled glance.

“ Darling, say you care for me a little,” he pleaded, holding her hand so hard it almost pained her.

“ You hurt me,” she said softly, trying to draw away her hand. “ See what a great red place,” and she affected to laugh with her old lightness.

“ Helen, don’t keep me in suspense !” he cried with fiery impatience. “ You know all I mean. Tell me, darling, just one word to put me out of my misery.”

“ Misery !” she repeated in a voice that was a little constrained. “ This is an ill compliment indeed. You ought to be supremely happy. Well, I will put you

out of your misery," and she attempted to rise. He held her down by the sheer force of his grasp.

"Don't trifle with me, Lady Helen," he uttered in an uncertain voice. "Don't you see I'm half mad with love of you. This is no time to put me off with feigned misunderstanding."

She turned her liquid eyes upon him. There was a strange kind of fascination for her in his handsome passionate face, a half-awed triumph.

"Hush!" she said softly. "Let me go. Sir Fulke, this must not be, indeed." There was entreaty in her tone.

"Must not be, Lady Helen? Why must not?"

"Because we can never be anything to each other."

"Why?" he gasped.

It was becoming embarrassing—this scene must have an end.

“I like you—I do not love you, Sir Fulke. I cannot marry you.”

He staggered to his feet.

“You do not love me?” he uttered in a bewildered voice.

Lady Helen rose too.

“Did I ever give you cause to think I loved you?” she said with a shade of hauteur.

He looked at her with a stupefied air. He hardly comprehended that a woman of such birth and refinement should tempt and lead him to these passionate emotions, merely to gratify her own vanity. Poor little Dorothy! had you but known how you were avenged in this moment! A fierce light came into Sir Fulke’s eyes, a light of passion and bitter anger. He caught the imperial beauty in his arms, regardless of her station, of her pride, and pressed his burning kisses upon her lips. Paralysed with fear, she could not move a

muscle to tear herself from his iron grasp.

“Now,” he cried passionately, releasing her, “summon your servants and have me turned out, for daring to take my own interpretation of your soft looks and low tones.”

“How dare you!” she gasped trembling from head to foot with passion.

“Because you dared me,” he answered between his teeth; “because if you sow the wind you will reap the whirlwind; because you made me love you with all my soul, simply to pass your idle hours, and then thought you could quell the passion you had raised with a cold glance and a few haughty words. I dared to show your ladyship your error.”

“Go!” she cried furiously, stamping her little foot, “and never see me again!”

“Never, please God, madam!” and he turned slowly and left her.

V.

I WAS walking down Piccadilly last June, with one of the Household Darlings. We sauntered by the handsome row of houses, passing an infinite number of pretty women in single broughams, on their way to charm the fashionable loungers with their *beaux yeux* and *belles toilettes*, an infinite number of dusty wayfarers who had not time even to enjoy the unknown *far niente* as a spectacle, an infinite number of miserable objects seeking to draw pity and alms from those to whom they formed so pitiful a contrast. Presently we turned into the park, and crossing to the Row were nearly run over by a pair of magnificent bay ponies. I had just time to catch a glimpse of their beautiful charioteer.

“Oh, who *is* that lovely woman?” I exclaimed to my companion.

“Don’t you know?” he answered laughing. “I thought you knew every one.”

“I plead ignorance. Tell me.”

“That is the Duchess of Orme. I'll tell you a story about her presently, if you like.” And, when a convenient opportunity offered, my friend repeated to me the foregoing story.

“And where is Sir Fulke now?” I asked, though I need hardly tell you, perhaps, that that was not his real name.

“Gone to India, to shoot tigers and stick pigs. He was awfully kind to my young brother out there. Such a nice gentleman-like fellow he is. I'll introduce him to you when he comes home.”

“Thanks. But how about poor little Dorothy?”

“Oh, she's quite got over her unfortunate love affair! I hear she's going to marry the village curate.”

“*A la bonne heure!* All's well that ends well,” said I. “Come and have some lunch.”

MILLY ADAIR.

MILLY ADAIR.

MILLY ADAIR! I can write the name coolly enough now, and yet once it made every pulse quicken, every nerve thrill. If the love we degenerate mortals are still capable of could only last—if two people who have once loved dearly could, after the lapse of years, feel the same passionate emotions stirring them that they knew in the first blush of their love—what better, fairer life could we desire than this! If love be sometimes torture, it is still the supremest, most desirable pleasure accorded to us. Milly Adair! with all these years between—how well I remember the first time I ever met your

golden brown eyes—ah me! how I remember too the last time!

I was back with my uncle at Arcot—my regiment had just returned from abroad and I had a long leave of absence. I had not been home three days before I saw Milly Adair—I say home, for Arcot was always home to me as far back as my memory dates. My father and mother were dead; my uncle had loved my mother passionately and had remained unmarried for her sake. I believe he would have considered it a real injustice for Arcot to pass into any hands but those of *her* child. Yes! there are some lasting loves in this world—the loves that never reach their idol; that are content to sacrifice themselves.

I never knew the want of father or mother; my uncle was both to me. If ever a child grew to boyhood—a boy to manhood thoroughly spoiled and indulged, it was I, Paul Wellinghame.

He was sorely grieved when I insisted on entering the Army, but I was selfish and resolute as all spoiled children are. Still, I loved the old man dearly; I could not bear to grieve him, but even less could I sacrifice my own pampered will to that of any other living creature. Shall I ever forget his joy when I came back after my three years' absence—bronzed, changed, grown from a boy into a man! How the dear old fellow held me at arms' length, grasping my hands with tears in his eyes, and longing, I verily believe, but for the shame of English manhood in him, to hug me to his breast. God bless that dear old man! If ever a noble, chivalrous, loving heart was enclosed in mortal frame, it beat in that of Vane Wellinghame. He had sorrow and travail of heart and vain longing here, but he knows a supremer bliss now than we who drained love's cup to the dregs ever dreamed of. Ay! the dregs are bitter, the sweetest of the cup is the

memory of the first taste after it has been dashed from our lips.

Arcot was a sort of show place in a small way before it was burned down. The farmers and untravelled gentry of that rustic neighbourhood believed in it religiously, and brought their friends to admire its beauties and antiquities. It had a sort of historical interest too, for Charles the Second, of gallant memory, had taken a night's refuge in it, and the young Pretender, Charles Edward, had been sheltered ten whole days beneath its roof. Beautiful Dorothy Wellinghame in that little time conceived such a violent and lasting passion for him, that she went single to her grave for his sake, although it is recorded on her picture that she had thirty-six offers of marriage, including one from a duke, and two from "lords of high degree." Worthy Mrs. Sellon, the house-keeper, once told me, during a confidential chat, that the picture of fair Dorothy

always excited intense interest in the sympathetic bosoms of the lady visitors.

"I've known 'em, Mr. Paul," she told me—"I've known 'em to stand ten minutes before that picture, and then come back to it again, when they'd make nothing of the two thousand guinea Sevrès solitaire set as belonged to Marry Antinett, or the picture which opens with a spring, and has a subterranean passage in it."

Arcot boasted a fair show of pictures for a country gentleman's house. I have a suspicion in my own mind that many which were firmly believed in as gems and paid dearly for were only clever makes-up of Italian rogues; but there *were* a Cuyp, a Vandyck, a Rembrandt, and a Watteau that I never heard disputed. Besides those, there was a *soi-disant* Murillo, which depicted a little beggar, dirty and swarthy enough to have attracted that great master's notice; a wet-eyed Magdalen by Guido; a woman fat and nude enough to

have been painted by the sensuous Peter Paul Rubens. But *cui bono* all these details? they have nothing to do with my story.

From twelve to three on Thursdays visitors were permitted to stare and chatter in the Arcot galleries. It was so long since I had been at home that I had quite forgotten the customary invasion, and had betaken myself to one of the embrasured windows of the cosy ante-room that preceded the long picture-gallery. It was a charming little nook, hung partly in tapestry, partly with little cabinet gems, and the beautiful arched ceiling was a masterpiece of some great man whose name I have forgotten. That was painted in the palmy days of the Wellinghames; we are not much now beyond the oldest and (in my uncle's time) the most respected family in the county.

I was fond of warmth; it was a bright spring day, and I had curled myself on

the velvet cushions in a flood of sunshine with a volume of Boccaccio. The warmth and the sensuous rhythmic verses made me drowsy, and I must have fallen asleep. I was away in sunny lands, under bright skies, amongst sweet sounds. Voices mixed with my dream—nay, I even seemed to distinguish what they said. “A face for a painter,” murmured sweet tones, and then I was away again lying on the grass under the orange boughs. It may have been only a second, it seemed a long time, when the sweet voice said again, “How sound he sleeps!” and I unclosed my eyes. A woman was standing a little way from me gazing at me from the depths of such eyes as I never saw before or since—yellow brown eyes with long black curling lashes. I looked at her without moving, doubting if I were yet awake ; a rosy flush lightened in her fair face, and she turned quickly away. Two other women were with her, quite different women—vulgar,

red-cheeked country lasses. They giggled and nudged each other, but La Esmeralda, my enchantress, had vanished through the hanging curtains that draped the doorway. Quickly enough they followed her, and I was alone, confused, half annoyed.

My first impulse was to make a rush for the private apartments: my second to follow and have one more glance at the *fille aux yeux d'or*. Are second thoughts always best? I would I had not acted on mine that day—I should have been spared many a grievous hour. But I did. Softly I raised the hanging curtain and glanced down the gallery. She was standing before the picture of hapless Dorothy Wellinghame, all absorbed in contemplation of the sad, fair face—her companions were in the midst of an animated discussion over a copy of Raffaelle's *Fornarina*. Of who Raffaelle or the *Fornarina* were they had as much idea as the man in the moon. One surmised it was Judith; the other

felt certain it must be a dreadful Roman Empress whose name began with an M. She couldn't remember any more, but they both declared she was beautiful. I always hated the great coarse face myself with its tangle of ruddy locks and its red brown eyes. How a man with a soul for beauty like Raffaelle could have gone mad over such a woman as that! I suppose the old proverb held good there, "*Chacun à son goût*," or as Raffaelle said it so infinitely better to Pope Julius—" *Ah, se sua Santità potesse guardala coi miei occhj!*!"

I went up softly to the girl who stood before our old family portrait and said,

"You have no one to explain the pictures."

She started and blushed.

"Thank you," she answered confused—"we have been here so often before; we know most of them. So we would not trouble Mrs. Sellon." Then she looked shyly back at the picture, and I looked—at her.

The face was not beautiful, but to my mind it was refined and piquante to a degree. The low broad forehead, the clear white skin, the long straight nose with the very faintest inclination to be *rétrossé* and an adorably short curled upper lip formed a more charming whole in my eyes than if the face had been composed of the most regular Greek features. And then those wonderful eyes ! But I had not seen them again yet. Did she know how I was dying for one glance at them, and was it a dash of coquetry that made her keep them so provokingly averted ? Her figure was slender, and I could see, in spite of the ill-fitting gloves and country made boots, that she had little hands and feet.

“ May I be your *cicerone* round the room ? ” I asked.

“ Thank you,” she answered still not looking at me, “ we should be ashamed to trouble you.”

Why should she insist on saying *we* and

us. As if those great vulgar dairymaids were included in my desire to talk to and to be of service to her ! They were standing staring at me now I felt without looking.

“ Do you know the story of the picture you are looking at ?”

“ I heard it when I first came here.”

Then I addressed her companions : they looked me full in the face delighted, and stammered, blushed, and called me Sir, while she, she would not even bestow one glance upon me. I began to think what I could do to make her look at me— whether I should indulge suddenly in some eccentricity. I took up an ivory carving of rare workmanship and put it into the hands of one of the rustic damsels.

“ Look at that carefully,” I said ; “ it is very wonderful ; the longer you look the more beauties you will find in it.”

The other sister bent over her, and they went obediently into raptures.

"Come with me," I whispered to the *fille aux yeux d'or*, "I want to show you something."

She gave a startled glance at me; I looked eagerly into the wonderful eyes; then abashed by my gaze, she dropped them and followed me silently. I went to an easel on which stood a small, perfectly-finished picture. It was La Esmeralda dancing in the sunshine, and Claude Frollo, half hidden in the heavy archway of Notre Dame, gazing at her with his very soul burning in his eyes.

"Do you know the story?" I asked her.

"No," she answered softly; "but what a lovely face! what an exquisite form! And that man watching her!—ah, what a horrible expression!"

"That was painted for me by a very clever Frenchman last year. The subject is taken from one of the most powerfully written books I ever read—'Notre Dame

de Paris,' by Victor Hugo. You have heard of it?"

"No."

I should as soon have thought of asking such a question of one of her companions as of addressing them in Hebrew, but somehow I felt as if this girl were one of my world and would be conversant with every topic of society.

"Will you tell me the story?"

"That man in the doorway is a priest; all his life has been devoted to art and science, to the discovery of the wonderful and the mysterious; to the triumph of mind over matter. One day he looked from his tower and saw the beautiful Egyptian dancing in the sunshine, and from that moment he gave up art, science, duty, religion, even God in the mad worship of a woman."

"And did she know it?"

"Yes."

"And so much love surely met with a

return?" and the wonderful eyes looked into mine without faltering this time.

"No; she loathed him. Do you see that gaily-dressed soldier leaning from the balcony amongst a bevy of young girls?—see! her eyes are turned to him. That is Phœbus de Chateaupers, the man she loves."

"And what became of her?" asked my companion eagerly.

"When the priest found he could not win her, he gave her up to be hanged."

"Oh! And the man she loved?"

"Cared nothing for her, and married another woman."

I felt how I should have liked to tell her this story at full length, and to have her expressive eyes fixed on me as she listened. A sort of madness was taking possession of me that I must win those lovely eyes to mine every moment—that I must gaze into their very depths until I was satisfied.

At this moment enter the red-cheeked damsels.

“It is most wonderfully beautiful, sir,” says one. “I never saw anything like it before.”

“Never!” echoes the other.

“Will you come into the gardens,” I say desperately, “and see the green-houses?” and the two look delighted, and a faint blush of pleasure comes into the face of my Esmeralda. I took them to the hothouses and gave them flowers—any that came first to the two, the purest, rarest, and most wax-like to my one, from a strange caprice all white or blush pink. Then we went to the orchard-houses, and I picked them strawberries—all the biggest and reddest for *her*. She took off her gloves to eat them and I glanced admiringly at the delicate fingers and filbert nails. Oh! how different from the red, pudgy hands of her companions. Her every action, every movement was full of

grace ; each moment that I spent in her company left me deeper impressed with her charms. I was filled with regret when we had made the round of the gardens and I could no longer find any pretext for detaining her. We arrived at the stables.

“They’re a-coming out ! Where’s that old trap stowed away ?” I heard one of the grooms shout, not too respectfully, and then, catching a glimpse of me with an unmistakeable expression of wrath in my eyes, he hurried off to the coach-house, and the pony and chaise were brought out with as much haste and alacrity as if they belonged to royalty.

I shook hands with the two young women first and then with *her*, and when they drove off she gave me a little well-bred quiet bow that could not have come with a more easy, indifferent grace from a Duchess.

Then I proceeded to bestow a sharp reprimand on the uncivil groom.

“Beg pardon, sir, I didn’t know as you was there.”

“That makes it all the worse,” I said angrily; “that you can only be civil when you dare not be otherwise.”

“Beg pardon, sir; meant no offence, I’m sure, sir. If they’d been ladies now, but bein’ only Farmer Elmore’s lasses——”

I turned away to the house and went into the housekeeper’s room. Mrs. Sellon was there looking over the china cupboard.

“You don’t mind my smoking?” I inquired.

“Lord bless your heart, no, sir; to think of your asking such a thing indeed. Who should please ‘emselves if it wasn’t you?”

“But this is your domain.”

“It’s only part and parcel of yours, Mr. Paul, or will be when the master gives it up, which I take the liberty to hope won’t be yet this long while.”

“Amen!” I responded sincerely. “Tell me, Prissy, (for in my more familiar moments I was wont to call her by her Christian name), who is the young lady who has just been here with the Elmores?”

“That’s Miss Milly Adair, as is engaged to young Joe.”

I felt the blood rush to my face, and turned away hastily, a horrible pain gnawing at my heart. What folly was this? A girl whom I had only seen for half an hour, and to feel this bitter disappointment, that though she was and could be nothing to me, she belonged to some one else.

Prissy went on talking without seeming to notice my confusion.

“Ay!” she said musingly, “that’s one of the oddest things, to my mind, how she could have took up with the likes of him. I doubt she’ll repent of it after it’s too late. They’re to be married in six weeks.”

“No!” said something so violently in my heart that I almost felt as though I had

spoken the word aloud. "That shall not be!"

"What is young Elmore like?" I asked trying to speak indifferently.

"Oh! he is a good sort of a young chap enough for a farmer's son, and they've eddicated him beyond what his father was, but Lord bless you! Mr. Paul, between him and her there's as much difference as between the gold rough in the nugget and a jewel in a lady's ear."

"Who is she, Prissy, and where does she come from?"

"Well, I don't know rightly, sir, no more does anyone else as I can make out. Three years ago she came to live at Farmer Elmore's, Miss Mildred Adair, they called her then, and I believe they had a handsome sum for taking her, and she had money of her own besides. One thing I'm quite certain of, she's a born lady. Now for Ann and Sue Elmore, I've known 'em from wee toddling things, and consider them as my

ekals; but though Miss Adair's always as nice as can be, and never gives herself no airs, I couldn't for the life of me help calling her miss, and feeling as if she was as much above me as you and the master."

"Then what on earth made her consent to marry the fellow?"

"Well, you see, sir, there's nothing about here but a lot of country oafs, and young Joe's the best of 'em, so I suppose she lost all hope of ever seeing anyone better, and so she took up with him. And, of course, if it is with her as folks suppose, why, it's not every man as 'ud care to marry a girl as couldn't name father nor mother."

"How long is it since she came to the farm?" I asked.

Prissy paused to reflect.

"It must be a matter of three years or more. Now I mind me, it was just immediately after you went abroad, Mr. Paul, because I remember the master a smilin' and saying to me, 'Mr. Paul's just off in

time, eh, Sellon ? He'd have been losing his heart to this pretty young lady, if she'd come a few days sooner.””

I rose abruptly, and strode out of the room. Good Mrs. Sellon, I daresay, wondered a little, but I was filled with rage at the thought of what Fate had done for me. Yet I could not attempt to say to myself, “If I had seen her when she was free I would have married her.” I knew it was dishonourable to think of her now that she was bound to another man, and yet I could not banish the thought of her.

Myself, Milly Adair, La Esmeralda and Claude Frollo were all mixed up together in a strange confusion in my brain. I began to understand how his mind was fascinated by her though he felt she was a snare of the devil; how he was seized with that unconquerable desire to follow her everywhere only just to see her. I longed intensely to go after Milly Adair that instant: I felt as if I could have

ridden twenty miles to get one more glance from those lustrous yellow eyes. Milly Adair! Milly Adair! the very name was sweet music to my ears. I repeated it over and over and over again.

I was so silent during our afternoon ride and at dinner that my uncle said anxiously,

“Paul, my dear boy, I am afraid you will soon have had enough of Arcot. An old man is not much company for you. Have some of your friends down.”

I roused myself to assure him that I was delighted to be at Arcot, and then I made a great effort to talk. I would not have wounded the dear old man for gold untold. We began to speak about farming, and different matters connected with the estate.

“That fellow Brayn will insist on going to law with me about a piece of land,” said my uncle, “and you know, Paul, legally, he has no more right to it than—than I

have to walk off with old Clarke's pedigree bull. But if he chooses to go to law, I shan't balk him—he deserves to lose a little money for his obstinacy, and he can afford it. Besides, I want to give Mill and Jones a turn, especially now they've taken young Joe Elmore into the business."

From that moment I took a violent interest in the affair—I even offered to go and see Mill and Jones about it.

"That's a good fellow, do!" said my uncle. "I hate anything to do with law, and it will be a little amusement for you. You might even go and see Joe Elmore at his father's house some evening before dinner—he leaves business at five. It will make him seem more important in his partner's eyes if we notice him, and old Elmore is the best tenant I have."

All the next day I could think of nothing but that I was going to see the yellow eyes—they looked at me from every book, from every picture—they seemed to take

a wicked malicious delight in tormenting me. I wandered about restlessly all the bright June morning ; through the gardens, the stables, the woods, feeling it impossible to settle to anything. And yet all the time I kept saying to myself, “It is only a trick of my imagination—when I see her again, I shall be completely *désillusionné*.”

“Send Cœur de Lion round at four, Bob,” I said to the head groom to whom it remained a mystery to the day of his death why I should bestow on such a noble animal the opprobrious epithet of cur.

Just as I was starting, my uncle came to the door.

“Why, Paul, you are not going yet ! it is only three miles to the Farm, and Joe can’t be home before half-past five.”

Sunburnt as I was, I felt the tell-tale colour creeping through, and stooped down to do something to the stirrup.

“I am going round through Lethleigh,” I answered. “Good-bye, sir, I shan’t be late for dinner.”

I rode along at a foot’s pace until I came to within fifty yards of the farm, then I drew rein, feeling as timid and nervous as a schoolboy. I believe it was the very first time that unpleasant sensation ever assailed me. I was going to see her, perhaps—to see her, but only in company with those vulgar apple-cheeked lasses or worse, and the thought made me turn hot and cold, of her betrothed. Gracious heavens! what a betrothal!

There was a little grass plot in front of the substantial farm-house, with a monster rose-tree laden with great yellow roses in the centre. And as I came up, my heart beat wildly at sight of a graceful figure in the act of robbing it of its fairest blossoms. It was Milly Adair, and alone. At sound of my horse’s hoofs she turned, and as she saw me started. Our eyes met.

No! I had made no mistake—it was no trick of my imagination—they were beautiful, those haunting eyes. The colour came to her cheeks as she advanced to the gate.

“Is,” (curse the fellow! I didn’t know how to call him), “is Mr. Elmore’s son at home?” I asked hurriedly, feeling as if she must detect my confusion. “I want to see him about some business.”

“He will be home at half-past five. They are all out,” she answered, seeming to share my embarrassment. As she did not invite me to dismount or stay, I said,

“Perhaps you will allow me to wait.”

A faint blush came to her fair face—the little white hand that held the gate twitched nervously. I was watching her so eagerly, I took note of every movement, every gesture.

“May I walk round the garden?” I continued in a voice imploring enough to

have suited the asking of some great favour.

“ Oh yes. I will call some one to hold your horse,” and she disappeared through the doorway, and presently a boy came running. I stood leaning against the gate. I could see her moving about in the little parlour, and a horror seized me that she did not mean to come out, but was going to let me wander about by myself—as if there was anything in all the house or garden that I wanted to see but her and her wonderful eyes. Presently, however, she came out again.

“ Did you get home safely yesterday?” I asked her.

“ Oh yes, thank you,” she answered with shy averted eyes. It seemed to me as if she knew the spell they cast on me, and was trying not to exercise it.

The garden was a large, old-fashioned one, with great plots of grass here and there, and rose-bushes and old yew-trees cut in fanciful shapes; and beyond that

was a kitchen garden, and beyond that again an orchard with weird, crooked apple-trees. I walked right away towards the orchard, and she was obliged to keep by my side. At first our conversation was a little forced and awkward, but by-and-by we seemed to get at home with each other. What a sweet, ringing laugh she had, and now she began to look at me when I spoke to her. I suppose some people have a kind of magnetic influence over each other. I kept my eyes fixed on her, longing, desiring intensely that she should return my gaze, and every moment she would look up as if constrained by some will not her own. And I—I was under the influence of some strange fascination. I hardly knew that my feet touched the ground. I was madly in love with Milly Adair already, and I made no more effort to check my passion than Claude Frollo did to subdue his for La "smeralda.

“ Give me a rose !” I said suddenly, as we came back to the flower-garden, and I stopped before a rose-bush bright with crimson buds.

She hesitated.

“ But you have such much more beautiful ones at Arcot.”

“ I would rather have one of these than all the Arcot flowers put together,” I exclaimed eagerly.

A blush suffused her cheeks. She plucked one and gave it to me with a cold, haughty air. I had gone too far. I dared not apologise, for fear of making matters worse, and at that moment she pointed towards the house, saying,

“ Here comes Mr. Elmore.”

Milly’s betrothed ! I looked up curiously. He was coming quickly towards us, taking his hat off when he came within twenty yards of me. I suppose I was not inclined to judge him favourably—this is what he seemed to me. A coarse-looking, florid

young man, rather tall and broad, good looking, I suppose, in a way, with great blue eyes, a most essentially plebeian nose, and a large mouth. There was a servility about the fellow that provoked me.

Good heavens! that clown Milly's affianced husband!

When he came up, she went into the house. The sunshine seemed gone then; the birds left off singing; the flowers lost their colour; everything had assumed a dull, sickly hue in my eyes; for the moment I even forgot the business which had brought me. Then, when he began to say something about the honour of a visit from me, I remembered suddenly, and hastened to enter upon Brayn's affair. I saw his eyes twinkle; I read his delighted vanity in being consulted by the Squire of Arcot before his partners, and saw my way through it to my own ends.

I don't know if I was really such a blackguard as I seem to be making myself out.

Perhaps, writing at this distance of time, I am premature in saying that such feelings had already taken possession of my mind at our first interview. They must have come later, when I was under deeper bondage to my headstrong passion. Before I left, it was settled that I should call again the following afternoon, to hear some particulars which he was to get for me in the meantime on the subject of Brayn's business. The fellow obsequiously wanted to wait upon me at Arcot, but I said that I was glad of an object for a ride, and would prefer to come to the farm.

I rode home a prey to the most horrible feelings. There was no longer any doubt in my mind that I had fallen madly in love with this woman—whether it was a snare, a temptation of the devil, I did not stop to ask myself. I only felt it was a torturing fact. I no longer hesitated to say to myself, "If she were free; if I had seen her a year ago, I would have married her."

I railed against Fate that sent me away wretched from her presence, and left her the property of that coarse clown. What sympathy could there be between such a pair? He must be loathsome and hateful in her eyes—that was my only comfort.

Day after day I rode over on some pretext or other, and though after the first day I never saw Milly alone, something yet made me think that she was not ignorant of nor altogether unresponsive to the feelings that burned within me. I wondered that no one, not even young Elmore himself, seemed to have any suspicion of the motive that prompted my frequent visits—my presence seemed only to cause him unmixed pride and satisfaction. He was never weary of talking over Brayn's miserable business.

What one endures for love's sake! I used to talk for hours to the old farmer about manure and crops and stock. I

made Mrs. Elmore and the rosy-cheeked damsels presents of fruit—of Milly I dared not seem to take notice. How lovely and graceful she looked amidst her vulgar surroundings! One afternoon when I was beginning to surrender myself to despair at the impossibility of getting speech with her, a lucky accident befell me. The Misses Adair's niece, quite the most horrid brat I ever saw, tumbled downstairs, and the devoted aunts rushed to the rescue, and a few minutes later, the old mother was summoned on some domestic matter, and I was at last alone with Milly.

A dead silence fell between us—then she rose and went to the window. I followed her trembling with passion and eagerness.

“Look at me!” I murmured passionately, and she turned her lovely eyes to mine glistening and humid with the expression of a startled fawn's.

“Milly! my darling!” I whispered catching at her hand.

"Oh! don't!" she muttered in a frightened voice, and then she snatched herself from me and ran out of the room.

She did not come in again although I stayed and stayed on hoping to see her. The Elmores pressed their hospitality upon me in the shape of plum cake and currant wine. I actually accepted it, although it was near dinner-time, and I knew the *chef* at Arcot would be wounded to the quick if I did not do justice to his dainties; but it gave me an excuse to stay a little longer. Weary enough that visit was—the Elmores were ill at ease; I felt I had nothing to stay for, and yet I stayed on. One dreadful thought oppressed me. What should I do with the hunch of cake and that awful red mixture! Fortunately help was at hand. The interesting infant who had just met with the fate of Jill in the nursery rhyme, had come in again, and was standing close to my knee with one finger in its mouth looking at my cake in a manner

that did not admit of two interpretations.

In a moment when no one was looking I slipped the lump into the wretch's hand, and it went off unobserved to munch it in a corner. I got rid of the wine in a way I little dreamed of. The garden gate was in sight of the window—suddenly I perceived Milly walking towards it, and presently Joe Elmore appeared on the other side. She opened the gate, and I saw him put his arm round her waist and kiss her. I always thought myself an adept at controlling my feelings, but sudden rage made me give a violent start, and I upset every drop of the currant wine upon the carpet. I have been in a good many awkward positions in my life, but I don't remember ever to have felt more overwhelmed or uncomfortable than I did at that moment. What with feeling I had seriously damaged the best parlour carpet, what with the guilty horror lest the cause of my sudden movement had been detected,

and over and above all what with that horrid imp pointing at me and crying with delight, "Oh, granny, look what the naughty man has done!" I felt inclined to seize my hat and rush out of the place.

Poor Mrs. Elmore did her best in her homely way to set my mind at rest, but it was at best a very uncomfortable situation. I took my leave as soon as possible, and going through the garden, saw Milly at a little distance with that brute's arm still round her waist. How I hated the fellow that he had a right to her! For the moment I hated her too. I set spurs to my horse and galloped home like the wind. I was absent all dinner-time. I could not eat. Every now and then I roused myself to say something, but all the time I felt my eyes were staring with a fixed blank look at whatever was before me, and that a sort of bitter, angry pain was gnawing at my heart. That beautiful, delicate creature submitting to, caring for the

caresses of—in my rage I called him by every opprobrious epithet that came into my mind. The cloth was removed, the silver lamps were lighted: I looked up suddenly and caught my uncle's eyes fixed full upon me.

“Paul, my boy, there is something wrong with you,” and the dear old man's voice faltered and he looked wistfully at me.

I was silent.

“My boy, can't you trust me? I've surmised it for some time; to-night there is not a shadow of doubt in my mind. Why, Paul, you know if you have got into any young man's scrape, if you want money, if you have any entanglement, you know, my boy, however bad it might be, that there is one man in the world you can come and tell it to who won't think hardly of you for it, or turn away his face from you.”

“God bless you, uncle!” I said getting

up and shaking him warmly by the hand.
“I know it. Don’t think I wouldn’t come straight to you if I were in a trouble where you could help me; I know your goodness too well of old, but—but there’s nothing wrong with me, I give you my word—I’m only a little out of sorts; I daresay my liver’s wrong.”

“You’re out of sorts because you’re not used to this kind of life, Paul. I’ve been thinking perhaps there is some woman you’re fond of and you’re pining to see her.”

“No, uncle, I don’t want to go five miles away from Arcot to see any woman living.”

That was true, God knows.

“Well, my dear boy, all I have to say is this—don’t feel you owe any duty or consideration to me. When you are tired of Arcot, don’t stay another day; I have but one wish in the world, and that is to see you happy.”

“Thank you, sir; I know that.”

All that night I never slept; my brain was in such torment, I felt as if I must go mad. Claude Frollo, with his hunted, hollow eyes, haunted me like a spectre. What if after all Milly loved that wretch like La Esmeralda loved her brainless Phœbus, and only felt a shrinking repugnance for me!

The day that followed was equally wretched: I did not even think of going over to the Farm but wandered about the grounds in a state of feverish wretchedness. After what I had seen the day before, a horrid doubt had taken possession of me that Milly, exquisite, refined as she was, really cared for that lout. One had heard of beauty and the beast before—nay, when I came to think of it, it was no unfrequent sight to behold a pretty delicate woman married to a coarse brutal husband. If I were willing to make the sacrifice of marrying her, would she even accept it? Some latent spark of honour

sent a pang of reproach through my heart at the idea of deliberately robbing the man, clown though he was, of what he probably valued most, for she seemed almost as certainly his as though the priest had joined their hands. But I had not been used to curb my will, and I said to myself, "She must, she shall be mine."

In the evening a messenger brought me a note from Elmore, telling me that he should be away all the following day as he had to take his sisters to B—, some fifteen miles distant. He took the liberty to write lest I might have the trouble of riding over to the Farm for nothing.

That decided me. I ordered my horse and rode off the next morning to see Milly. Yes, I recked nothing of consequences—of honour, of dishonour—I was going to see her with the deliberate intention of taking her from her betrothed husband if I could —of asking her to be my wife. I knew that I should raise a storm about us—that

my uncle, who was the soul of honour, would refuse all countenance to my passion, but, if I succeeded in winning her, then let come what might! And yet when I reached the farm, a terrible misgiving rose in my heart. What if she turned a deaf ear to my suit! what if she banished me from her presence! what if I were going to see her for the last time? if in a few minutes, an hour at latest, I should have looked my last into those gold-brown eyes.

She opened the door to me herself, looking more bewitching, more gracious than ever to my hungered eyes. There was some surprise, some coldness in her manner, and yet I saw the little hand tremble on the latch of the door.

“They are all out, sir,” she said, even before I had time to speak. It was the first time she had ever called me sir. Did she do it to wound me? I wondered.

“I know it,” I answered, “that is why

I am here. I came to see you. Will you come out with me into the garden? I have something to say to you."

For a moment she stood irresolute, the shifting colour playing in her fair face.

"Do come!" I cried, throwing into eyes and voice all the intensity of my desire, and without a word she came out and joined me.

I took my way down over the grass till we were almost out of sight of the house and then I stopped by a rose-tree that stood behind a clump of yew. I had thought before of a hundred things that I would say to move her to compassion; now that she was by my side looking so cold and unconscious, a sudden rage took possession of me.

"Do you want to drive me mad?" I said bitterly--"don't you know how you are torturing me? My life is a very hell to me, and you do not care."

She raised her hand as if to pluck one

of the big red roses. I grasped it suddenly with mine, and pressed it together on the flower till the sharp thorns ran into the delicate flesh, and made the blood spurt out. A sort of savage cruelty, a desire to hurt her, had come over me. She uttered a little cry, and looked at me like some frightened child, and then an anguish of remorse seized me. I wiped the blood away with kisses.

“Oh don’t! don’t! how cruel you are!” she said faintly—“have you no pity on me?”

“Pity!” I cried—“oh Milly! when I love you with all my soul!—love you so that I am nearly mad! Sometimes I have thought you knew it, and loved to torture me. Do you remember that story I told you the first time I ever saw you—the story of the monk and the dancing girl—how her image took possession of him until day and night he had no other thought? So you have been to me—only

tell me, darling, that you do not hate me and shrink from me as she did from him."

She gazed at me half stupefied, then she broke into a low sob.

"How can you be so cruel?" she cried at last—"why have you come here to make me miserable? I was happy enough when I knew nothing else."

"You could not be happy," I answered passionately. "With a refined soul like yours, how could you lower yourself to the level of such clods as Elmore and his family—what sympathy could there be between you?"

"Stop!" she exclaimed proudly—"you have no right to speak so, and they have been very good to me. Oh! if you loved me," she went on bitterly, "you would have kept away; you would not come here to torture me when you know it is impossible we can ever be anything to each other."

"Impossible, Milly?" I pleaded.

“Yes, impossible,” she answered quickly. “I will never see you any more. For days and days I have gone about like some guilty creature, trembling every time I saw the man I am to marry, feeling that I was wronging his trust in me because I could not keep my thoughts from you. Yes, I may tell you all now, for I shall never see you again. You are my ideal, you are all I have dreamed of in my foolish girl’s romance of the man I could love. I felt it the very first moment I saw you lying asleep in the sunshine at Arcot.”

“Milly!” I said in an agony that she would keep her resolve not to see me any more, “can you not see that Fate has drawn us together? It was not our own will, our own seeking, that our hearts went out to each other from the first moment we met; it was one of the strange, mysterious workings of nature. We feel from the very depths of our hearts that we can be all-in-all to each other—our love is no

common every-day one, and are we from some absurd scruple, that is not worthy to be entertained by rational beings, wantonly to throw away such happiness as even the gods might envy. Oh child! don't blight both our lives for some fanatic fancy of right, for some miserable Juggernaut image of duty—in such love as ours our duty is to each other."

"Don't talk so," she faltered, "*you know* it is wrong. I cannot argue against you because I love you. You should help me to be strong. How can I break my word to him? For eight months I have been engaged to him. This very day three weeks," (shuddering), "I am to marry him."

I took her hands and held them tight between my own.

"You are to marry him," I said looking into her eyes, "and the thought makes you shrink and shiver. Do you suppose that the fact of saying a few words at the altar

will give your heart to him and wrench it from me? You will have divorced the soul from your body. When it is too late you will see that you wantonly threw away your happiness for a distorted idea of right. Only think," I went on with impassioned eagerness—"Only think what it would be, after feeling for each other as we do, to be parted, longing, hungering for one look, willing to make any sacrifice when it was too late for even one little hand-pressure. Milly! darling! you say you love me, and could you be content to let me go away now feeling that you would never see me again? No; a love like ours can sacrifice home, friends, all but itself. And I don't want any sacrifice of you, darling! I have come here to-day to ask you to be my wife."

She looked up at me with a bewildered glance.

"Your wife?" she said slowly. "What! give him up after these months and years,

and tell them that I am going to marry you, whom I have only spoken a few words to in my life? And after all," (sadly), "it may be only a caprice of yours—if I took you at your word, you would repent of it, even to-day perhaps. Oh no! the only kindness you can do me is to go away, and never to let me see you again, and then, perhaps," (her voice breaking into a sob), "I may some day leave off thinking of you, and things may be as they were before I saw you."

"Look into my eyes!" I said. "Do you read caprice there? Did you never hear of love coming suddenly into a man's life, and taking up its abode there until it ousted every other thought, wish, ambition? Such a love is mine. Oh! if you knew what I have suffered for your sake these past three weeks, you would not talk to me of caprice."

She shook her head unconvinced.

"I am no wife for you," she said in a

troubled voice, and then blushing deeply. "I do not know who my parents are, nor even if they are alive. And do you think," lifting her eyes to mine, "that your uncle would ever consent to receive me? Do you think I could ever hold up my head in a place where I had rewarded the kindness of these people with such base treachery?"

Looking into those lovely eyes, nothing seemed impossible to me except to give her up.

Every argument, every entreaty that I could think of I used to extort from her the promise that she would give Elmore up —she only shook her head sadly. Then I entreated her to meet me the next day in the Arcot woods, a mile distant. His sisters, she told me, had gone away for a week, so there would be no one to miss her if she stole away for an hour or two.

"Say you will come and meet me to-morrow at this time," I implored. "No one passes through there but the wood-

cutters, and there is no timber felled this year."

"No, no, no. Oh, *pray* don't ask me!" she entreated. "I dare not."

"Child, have some pity upon me—say that you will come; if I don't see you, I shall go mad!"

She was silent.

"Say you will come."

"I will come once then for five minutes."

"To-morrow?"

"Yes. Now do, *do* go!"

"You are tired of me already," I said reproachfully.

Tears stood in her eyes; I stooped to kiss them away, but she tore herself from my arms crying,

"Oh, I beseech you go!"

And I went, leaving my darling in tears and rode away heavy-hearted. But my spirits rose at the thought that I was to see her again to-morrow. And now I

knew that she loved me, I had no fear for the future—I felt that I should triumph—that she would be mine.

How my heart beat the next day when I went to keep my tryst!—I never doubted that she would come. I waited and waited patiently, happily at first, deep in my own thoughts; then, as the slow minutes dragged on, restlessly, miserably, impatiently. She did not come. I wandered to the end of the lane; there was no sign of her and I went away bitter, angry, wretched. I had waited three hours. The next day I went again, she was not there; the third day I had lost all hope, but still I went and then she came.

“I could not stay away any longer,” she faltered, and I forgot to reproach her with all the miserable hours I had spent waiting for her.

She brought me news of a reprieve. The sister, with whom the Elmores had gone to stay, had died suddenly in a fit,

and they remained to console the afflicted widower and to look after his children. The wedding was put off. God forgive me that, in my selfishness, I never thought to be sorry for the grief of these poor people; it was simply a matter of rejoicing and congratulation to me. Milly showed more heart than I did; she utterly refused to give the slightest hint of any alteration in her feelings to either Elmore or his parents.

Every one almost of those summer days we met, sometimes in the morning, sometimes in the afternoon, and we sat together under the canopy of leaves, smitten here and there by a warm sunbeam to remind us happily of how bright the long summer days were. I could lie at her feet looking up unchecked into those eyes that fascinated me more than ever: I could listen to her sweet voice, feeling that its music was for me only. She would tell me of her former life, about herself—all

she knew, at least ; that was not very much. She did not know if she had a father or mother : from her earliest infancy she had been placed at schools or in respectable families. They had always treated her kindly, and she had been moved from one place to another under the care of a superior elderly woman, a kind of upper servant. Her only clue to what she was, was in a sentence that she once heard from the woman's lips. She had fallen asleep in the room of an inn where they had dined on one occasion of her changing homes, and just as she woke she heard a voice speaking to the woman who was with her.

“ She looks every inch a lady,” it said.

“ Ay,” she answered, “ she’s got the breeding of both of ‘em, more’s the pity.”

“ I unclosed my eyes then,” Milly said, “ just in time to see some one leaving the room. I begged Mrs. Harwood to tell me

about my parents, but she only said coldly,

“‘They’re both dead long ago.’

“I was brought here at last,” Milly went on, “to old Mr. Elmore’s. I was so miserable and lonely at first, and I could not help thinking that I had been sent to this out of the way place that my existence might be entirely forgotten. But they were all very good and kind. Do you know, Paul,” and the faint pink blush I loved so much overspread her face—“do you know I had such romantic dreams and fancies as a young girl. You can’t think how I wearied after the fairy prince or the young Squire of the place, and my heart quite sank when I found there was no one at Arcot but an old man.”

“If you had only come before I went away,” I interrupted her passionately.

“And I craved so to be loved and admired, and when it grew very, very dull and miserable at the Farm, my great aspira-

tions dwindled down, and I felt it was better to have the admiration of the common countrymen about than to eat my heart out alone. You know I had never really mixed with men of the world, so it did not seem so hard to me. And Joe was very good and kind to me, he loves me dearly in his way," and the tears came into her eyes.

I felt a jealous rage that she should have tender thoughts of him; of any man living but me.

"Why, Paul," she said reproachfully, "what chance could men like that have against you, with your breeding, your refinement, your beautiful intellectual face!"

One day I was lying at her feet in my favourite attitude, one hand under my head, when I started suddenly to see some one close upon us; I had not heard the approach of feet: it was my uncle. He stood for a moment speechless at sight of us—then he turned and went away.

“What is it?” cried Milly terrified, seeing me spring to my feet and crimson with confusion. “Oh, Paul! your uncle!” and she too started up. “I must never meet you here any more,” she cried hurriedly—“oh, what will become of me!”

“Don’t think anything of it, darling,” I implored. “I will explain to him—my uncle is the last man in the world to thwart me or get us into trouble.”

“I must never come any more,” she reiterated in a trembling voice, and she moved away from me.

“Milly!”

But she would not stay, and so I let her go, and plunged miserably into the woods. I could not meet my uncle—it was the greatest effort to me that night to go in to dinner. During the meal he talked as if nothing had happened—even when the cloth was removed and the servants gone, he did not speak of the morning as I expected. It was only when we were sitting

out on the terrace with our coffee and cigars that he broached the subject I had been waiting feverishly for. There had been silence for some minutes—he broke it at last.

“I know now what ails you, Paul.”

I was silent.

“If you had got into debt; if you had run wild like many young men in the service do—if you had gambled away half Arcot, it would not have hurt me like it does to see you bringing misery to an honest man’s hearth.”

Still I was silent. He went on—

“I know these things are done in the world. I know there are plenty of unscrupulous men who care for nothing so that they gratify their own selfish passions, but I never thought I should live to see a Wellinghame act like a blackguard.”

My anger flamed up at his words.

“You judge me rather hastily, sir,” I cried. “I do not know why you should

imagine that my intentions are anything but honourable."

"Honourable!" he repeated with grave emphasis. "How can they be honourable in any sense of the word when the object of them is the affianced wife of another man?"

I was silent.

"Will you answer me a question, Paul?" he asked after a pause. "When you first met this—this girl, did you know she was to marry Elmore?"

"No," I answered. That was true.

"Did you know it before you met her again?"

I could not answer him. I could not even bring my eyes to meet his.

"You did, I assume," continued my uncle in his grave kind voice. "And then, from idleness, from wickedness, from some devilry or other," (passion growing in him as he spoke), "you set yourself deliberately to work to entrap this poor

foolish creature, and to seduce her affections from the honest fellow to whom they belonged as lawfully as though the marriage service had been read over them."

My blood took fire at his words.

"I came fortunately in time to rescue her from a miserable fate. Good God! sir, have you ever seen her? Have you the slightest idea of what a monstrous thing it would be to tie that exquisitely delicate creature to a clown like Elmore?"

"Perhaps," returned my uncle with a sarcasm quite unusual to him, "perhaps the clown has a truer heart and a keener sense of honour than some men who wear fine clothes and have well-cut features. Great Heaven!" with rising passion, "do I live to see the day when a Wellinghame, when a son of one of the most chivalrous, honourable families in the land makes use of his position to creep into the house of an honest man and to steal from him, like a common thief, the dearest treasure that

he owns! What man with the soul of a gentleman would not hold sacred such a tie!—would not turn his eyes from the fairest woman in the world once he knew she was bound to another! And these worthy people, whose family is as old as ours, who have lived on our land from father to son for a dozen generations—do you think I will ever countenance such a wrong to them? God knows, Paul," and the kind old man's voice trembled, "it is hard for me to bid you go from here, but it is the only thing for it. You *must* leave this and at once."

"It is too late," I answered. "I cannot, will not give her up. I intend to marry her."

"What!" cried my uncle as if he could not trust his senses. "She is engaged to Elmore and to you at the same time! She has consented to marry you!"

"Half," I answered doggedly. "At all events she will never marry him."

“And by God!” cried my uncle with a passion quite unusual to him, “you shall never marry her with my consent. If you do, you shall not set foot in Arcot again until I am stiff and stark in death. I give you three days. If you have not renounced the girl and left this by then, I will go straight to Elmore and tell him the whole truth. Never shall it be said that Vane Wellinghame connived at dishonour!”

I rose suddenly and rushed away down the terrace steps into the garden and away to the woods.

“Oh, Milly!” I groaned. “Milly darling, I won’t give you up.”

I went to her the next day.

“Can you bear to part from me,” I asked her, “to part from me knowing that you will never see me any more?”

“Oh, Paul!” she cried terrified, “what do you mean?”

“There is only one thing left for us. In a few days, unless you will give up

everything and trust to me, Elmore will know all. My uncle has threatened to warn him and he will keep his word."

Milly stood petrified.

"Will you come away with me," I said feverishly. "You know how dearly I love you. Milly, won't you trust me?"

"I cannot," she sobbed. "Oh, Paul, don't ask me."

"Then you are content never to see me again?" I asked bitterly, "content to live all the long miserable days and years without looking in my face or hearing my voice. You must be stronger than I am, Milly."

"If I could only die!" she said miserably.

Then I pleaded with her like one who pleads for dear life—at last I won.

Two days later we left Arcot together.

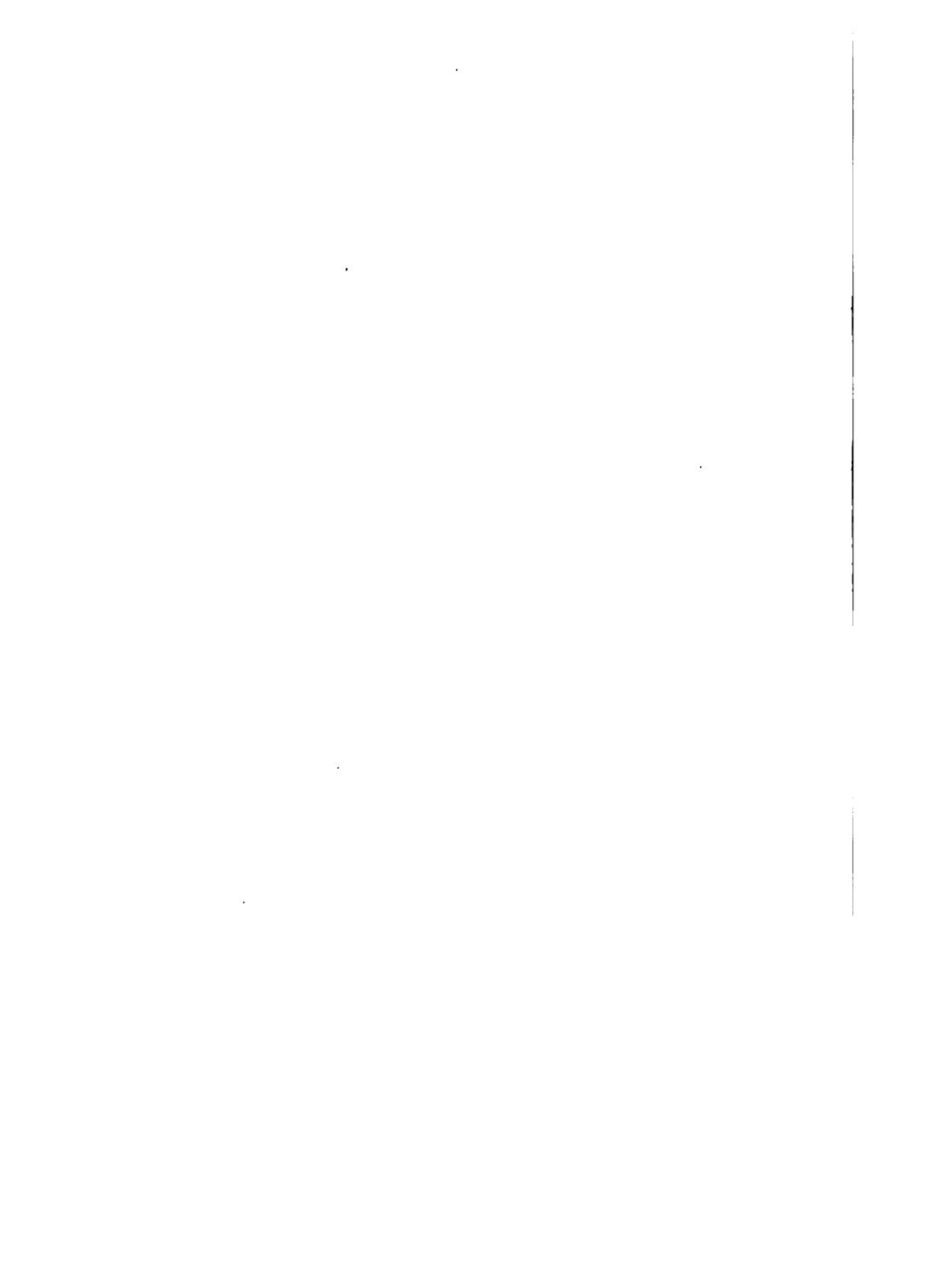
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You know, Athol, whether my married life was a happy one. Three short months

of illusion and then years of bitter regrets. You know how soured and disappointed I became—how, alienated from my uncle, from Arcot, I never ceased to be gnawed by a desire to return to him and to the old home. She did not make me happy—poor soul ! perhaps it was my own fault. For she loved me—she did not tire of me as I did of her. Honour cannot come out of dishonour. Fate gave me what I craved in my headstrong selfish passion, but gave with it the remorse and disappointment that always follow swiftly on the gratification of an unlawful desire.

I had my way. She is dead now, and I have spoiled my life.

IN THE APPLE ORCHARD.



IN THE APPLE ORCHARD.

CHAPTER I.

A GLOWING May day, with a cloudless Italian sky; a day that might have betokened July or August but for the fresh greenness of the sprouting leaves and budding hedges. And, that you may not have a single doubt that this is May, the fairest month in all the year, come with me to yonder orchard and pluck a cluster of thick pink apple-blossom, that nestles on the old trees like new-fallen snow tinged by a rosy sunset. Ah, and when you have come with me to that apple-orchard, where the grass grows so

green and thick, and where the pink leaves have fallen softly, you will be in no hurry to turn your back upon the scene and pass back through the wood gate to the dusty road. Hush! don't let them hear the lock creak; a flock of merry girls is sooner scared from mirth than the fairies who dance by moonlight in their magic ring.

It was a pretty group that we watched unseen that May afternoon, passed long ago now; but I remember it—remember it as one does some half-dozen scenes in the course of a lifetime. How they stand out, undimmed by time, like the colours of a master-painter, and yet seem overspread with a haze of unreality, as though they might have been only vivid dreams—fairy-land that we visited in sleep.

Four girls were sitting or half-lying under the old apple-trees; three quite young, one older. A white cloth was spread on the grass; tea, cream, cakes, a great home-made loaf, and tiny pats of

tempting butter were laid out for the refreshment of the young damsels, whose appetites were certainly not fairy-like.

“What a delightful thought to have tea out of doors!” cried one rapturously, pausing with the cup half-way to her lips.

“Ah! yes, but you don’t know the trouble I had to persuade Granny to allow it,” responded a bright young voice that issued from the rosebud mouth of the prettiest of the quartette. “She declared we should catch our deaths of cold, or be laid up with rheumatism and lumbago all the summer. And when I asked her to come too, she gave the funniest little shiver, and said the bare thought made every bone in her body ache. And then, after a long lecture about buying experience, and giddy brains, she toddled off into the dairy, got me the cream, sent Nanny to lay the cloth, and made me make a solemn promise to sit on my waterproof cloak. Oh, dear! I forgot all about it until this very moment,

and I declare if Lion is not lying upon it. Lion, Lion, bring it here, sir, this instant. Good dog." And the pretty arms were thrown round the great head of the St. Bernard, and little Maud was nestling her face against her faithful old friend.

" Oh, the grass is as dry as dry !" chimed in the third, rubbing a little brown hand over the grass ; " who could possibly take cold such a day as this ? It is like August. I'm so hot, I can scarcely breathe. Give me some milk, Katie ; I am dying of thirst."

Presently tea was over, and the conversation began to flow more freely.

" How sweet the spring-time is," said Katie, a dark-haired syren with grey eyes, pensively, " when all the birds begin to sing, and the flowers come out, and one feels so glad and happy, without quite knowing why !"

" You should be a poetess, Katie," mocked her sister, an arch brunette, " and write

hymns to the spring or odes to the lark, and ink the tip of your nose with your pen while you were invoking inspiration to help you to an impossible rhyme. I wonder if Byron or Shelley had to go all the way down the alphabet on one syllable to make their poetry, like I did when I wrote the valentine for cousin George."

"Don't be so silly, Bell," remonstrated gentle Katie; "you always make fun of everything; and, Margaret, *you* know what I mean about the spring, don't you?" she added appealingly.

"Yes, dear," came the answer in a low sad voice; "I know, or at least I knew well enough when I was your age. When one gets older, and has been sorely disappointed—when one has hoped, and longed, and looked forward, only to see every hope blighted, every bright picture of the future blurred out by pain and weariness—one leaves off being glad because the sun shines and the birds sing and the flowers have

come out once more; one only feels it bitter that there should be so much promise, and so little fulfilment."

The last speaker was ten years older than any of the rest of the party. She had been very handsome, was handsome still but for the weariness and suffering stamped upon her features.

"Maggie darling!" and a soft face was laid against her cheek, and ready tears of sympathy sprang into little Maud's hazel eyes. "Don't be sad to-day, dear; smile at me; it is my birthday, you know."

Margaret smiled.

"I am a sad kill-joy, dear little Maud, am I not? and I was wrong, too, just now. There is a great deal to be glad of in the world, a great deal to make one happy, if one has only a contented heart; and you children, with all your lives before you, have many glad days in store, please God."

"I wish real life were like the fairy tales," said Katie thoughtfully; "as much

like it as the blue sky, and the spring flowers, and the birds."

"I wish there were fairy princes," cried Bell impatiently, "and that they would ride up on their prancing steeds and carry us off to court, and fight for us, and proclaim us Queens of Beauty. Not that I am particular about my adorer being a fairy prince," rattled on the madcap; "indeed, I would rather not, lest he might evaporate into thin air some day when one least expected it. I should be quite content if some eligible young man, in the costume of the present day, were to walk up this moment and say, 'Miss Bell, I have conceived a sudden and violent passion for you; in my eyes you are the loveliest creature in the world; my prospects are desirable in every way; pray do me the honour to accept my heart and hand.'"

"Oh, Bell!" interposed Maud, "I don't believe you ever could be really in love."

"And why not, pray, Miss?"

“Because you would never be long enough in the same mind, and—and I don’t believe you could feel sentimental if you tried ever so much.”

“But I shouldn’t try; and, besides, it’s not the fashion. No one breaks their hearts now-a-days, Maud, and, if they did, I should be a brilliant exception to the rule. No; I should like to have a dozen lovers at my feet, and be very cruel, and laugh at them all: then they would be so humble, and give in to all my caprices. You know, Maud, it must be one thing or the other,” proceeded Miss Bell oracularly; “a man must either be your tyrant, or you his; and, for my own part, I should decidedly prefer the latter.”

“Oh no, no, no!” cried Maud, the colour mounting to her cheeks; “I would not have it like that for all the world. I should like some one who was very great and clever, that I could almost worship, but should be rather afraid of; and I

should be quite content if he only let me love him, and thought of me as a poor little weak woman who depended upon him for everything, and loved me for my very weakness and helplessness." And Maud threw herself back on the grass with her hands folded under her head, and a rapt expression in her eyes, as if somewhere far away in the distance she saw the ideal she could have worshipped.

At this moment the orchard gate opened behind her, and two gentlemen came towards the group: one an elderly, grey-haired man, with a slight stoop, the other considerably younger, yet not young, with a bronzed face and distinguished air. His grey eyes rested well pleased on the scene before him—one painter and poet might have thought well worth immortalising. The great golden sun declining towards the west, and lighting up every shade of tender green as he went; a fairy perspective of woods, and fields, and shimmering

water in the distance ; overhead the clusters of sweet shell-tinted blossoms, and beneath, sweeter and fairer than all, the fresh young faces, with hope, and love, and trust, written deep down in the clear wells of their eyes.

“ Maud !” and in a moment Maud had sprung to her feet, and was standing confused, blushing rosy red, before the stranger. The dog had jumped up too, and Maud’s hand was on his neck, twined in a wreath of pink blossom she had made for her big friend. The stranger thought somehow of Una and the Lion.

“ This is my little daughter, Maud,” said the grey-haired man, with a fond proud smile ; “ these are our near neighbours—Miss Katie and Miss Bell Walton ; and that is my niece, Margaret Wilson.”

The stranger bowed courteously as each of the group was mentioned separately, and then his eyes wandered back to Una.

“ And now,” continued Maud’s father,

"I must tell them who you are. This is Mr. Ruthven, Maud, who has come back at last to live amongst us; you were too young to remember him before he went abroad."

Four eager pairs of eyes were fixed at once curiously upon the new-comer. This then was the man who had created so much mystery in their minds, about whom they had so often speculated in their many gossips, whose return they had so ardently desired. I think three, at least, felt a shade of disappointment that he was so like other men, that he only looked like a grave, rather sad man of middle age. He seemed so old to all but Margaret, much too old to awaken any deeper interest than curiosity in their hearts. Yet he was not more than forty; there were but few threads of silver in the dark hair, and the eyes were as bright and keen as those of a man ten years younger. He came forward and put out his hand to Maud.

"I hope we shall soon be much better acquainted ;" and as the smile deepened round his mouth, the careworn face grew quite handsome. "And this is your dog ?" he went on, laying a hand on Lion's head. "What a big pet for such a little lady !"

"He is her protector," smiled Mr. Douglas. "She is always rambling about from morning till night, and, as I cannot afford to keep a servant to follow her everywhere, Lion is a most efficient substitute."

"He looks quite aware of his responsibility," said Mr. Ruthven with another smile. "Good old dog !" and he patted Lion again.

The dog looked at him gravely for a moment, and then wagged his tail slowly.

"You don't know what a compliment that is from Lion," cried Maud ; "he hardly ever takes notice of any one ; and, if I am alone with him, he never allows a stranger to touch him."

“I don’t think I ever saw a finer specimen of his race, Miss Douglas, and I have seen a great many.”

Then Mr. Ruthven turned to the others, and said :

“I hope you young ladies will all come up to the Court, and have tea with me some afternoon. The rooms will be in order after to-morrow, and I think you would like to see the pictures. The hot-houses are full of flowers too, and I shall be able to give you strawberries and cream, if that is an additional inducement. Shall we fix the day after to-morrow—Friday?”

“Oh, not Friday!” cried impulsive Bell, “that is an unlucky day;” and then she blushed crimson at her own boldness.

“Then we certainly will not say Friday,” interposed Mr. Ruthven kindly; “for I wish everything to be most auspicious the first time I have visitors at the Court after such a long season of gloom and seclusion.

May I expect you all on Saturday evening, Mr. Douglas?"

A general assent was given, and Mr. Stephen Chace took leave of the company cordially with these words: "Good bye, Miss Douglas," he said, "you will not be sorry to find in the next

few days a good deal of time to

spend in the orchard, and

you will be welcome to

the house whenever you

will call, and I hope you will

have a happy and

prosperous summer."

CHAPTER II.

ARTHUR RUTHVEN sat alone in the oak wainscoted dining-room at the Court. The servants had removed the cloth, and as twilight fell around, the ruddy glow of the fire in the great chimney sent its flickering light over the old room. Now it shone fitfully through the bright red wines—now lighted up the deep embrasures of the mullioned windows—anon it cast a deep broad glare over some rare picture, or sent a glow across the carved crossbeams of the oaken ceiling.

His eyes were wide open, a cigar between his lips; but he was away in dreamland—in an apple orchard amongst a mass of pink clustering blossom, looking

at a slight childish form, whose arms were thrown around a great tawny dog, and who dropped her big abashed eyes before his fervent gaze. It was eighteen years since Arthur Ruthven had cared much to think of a woman—eighteen long years since he had trusted, or loved, or believed in one; now, to-night, he was haunted by the remembrance of a little child-like maiden with wistful eyes, and the desire for a new and different life that had slept in him so long came back to him across the broad deep gulf of time past. With eyes wide open, yet seeing nothing; with the bright firelight flickering, and all the fair landscape without deepening into the gloom of night, he sat thinking over his life, of his early manhood full of promise and brightness; a world big as Alexander's to conquer; of a season of exultant gladness, of youth, strength, and love; and then a sudden darkness, a blackness as of night came in the bright day-time, while the sun

was yet high in heaven. God ! to have loved like that, and been deceived ! After all these years the remembrance had still power to stir him : " Leonore, Leonore," and his lips pronounced audibly the name that had been dead so long to him. If it were only possible that another love might come to him now—now, when he thought he had ceased to desire a woman's presence or a woman's voice—when he had believed that science and art might fill up the great void in the human heart, and make existence better worth having than the ties of blood and love. And then, creeping chill and cold to his very soul, came the difference in himself that so often torments the noblest minds. What was there in him, it whispered, to win the love of a fresh young girl—in him, who was so weary, so old, so world-worn ? Would a woman ever love him again—love him for his own sake ? There might be many who would take him gladly for his position

and his wealth ; who would smile upon him with false eyes, and hang upon him with feigned fondness. Pah ! he sickened at the thought—it made him think, shuddering, of the old pain. Oh, for one loving glance from eyes that had never learned deceit, one tender clasp of innocent arms ! and Arthur Ruthven thought Heaven might yet come upon earth, and the bitterness of the past be atoned in one draught of pure happiness.

Presently he roused himself with a start. It was quite dark, the fire was out, and his cigar had fallen but half-consumed into the Sèvres dish. He lighted a fresh one and went out for a stroll on the terrace. But the same picture followed him ; and for all the world he could not remember the name of the rector's little daughter,—could only think of Una and the Lion. He found himself wishing to see her again, longing for Saturday, and almost vexed with himself for having yielded to Bell's

scruples concerning Friday. When the day came he felt quite unsettled ; his books were thrown aside, he wandered through the rooms, strolled into the stables and gardens, and finally endeavoured to make a sketch of Una from memory. But though the most vivid picture of her was engraven upon his mind, he could not remember a single feature when he wanted to transfer it to canvas ; so at last he gave up the attempt in despair, thinking to himself he would get her to sit to him for a fancy picture of the pure maiden of ancient story. Five o'clock came, and his heart beat like a schoolboy's as he saw the party of visitors approaching through the broad chestnut avenue. He caught sight of Maud caressingly on her father's arm, while Lion marched gravely at her heels, and a sudden gladness came into his heart, and a smile of such infinite tenderness deepened round the sad mouth—one must perforce

have owned Arthur Ruthven a man not yet too old or stern to win the love of girl or woman. How he watched over Maud during her visit,—kept by her side, showed her everything that he thought might amuse her, told her stories in the picture gallery, picked her all the choicest flowers, piled her plate with the biggest, reddest strawberries, and heaped attentions upon Lion for the very love of her. And as the days and weeks rolled on, how he grew to love her ! to love her so that there was not one thought in his heart which had not some reference to her, not one wish for the future in which she was not the sun all other brightness radiated from.

He made the shallowest excuses for calling at the Rectory ; he brought her flowers, fruit, books, music, anything he fancied would please her. He met her in her rambles, painted her picture in a dozen different attitudes with Lion ; listened with well-assumed interest to the story of all

Granny's ailments; received her advice with respectful attention, and promised faithfully to try the efficacy of her numerous recipes. In short, he was as passionately infatuated with his idol as a boy—only his passion was not evanescent.

And Maud—he was everything to Maud—a new feature in her life, a fairy god-father, who showered gifts upon her, and made her days one long holiday. She was always full of smiles for him, brimming over with happiness, with sunshine and laughter—no cloud came across the clear heaven of her sky in the dawn of that new existence.

But Arthur Ruthven never deceived himself for one moment; he knew it was not love this simple-hearted child had in her heart for him,—knew it because her eyes never sank abashed from his gaze, because there was no faltering in her voice when she spoke to him, no tremor in the little hands she stretched out so gladly to

greet him. No ; her feeling for him was the same as she would have had for a dear brother—for a father, perhaps. That was his keenest pain ; aversion he might have conquered, indifference he might have overcome ; but that sweet sisterly affection given from the depths of the heart, and shown in the clear truthful eyes that were like deep wells of water: that was the hardest trial for a man who craved and thirsted for another kind of love. Sometimes he asked himself if it were possible for him to be content with that love rather than force himself to relinquish all thought of her; if, knowing no other deeper feeling, she would give herself to him, it would be right for him to take her ? Oh, merciful heaven ! if after he in his selfishness had tied and bound that bright young child-life to his, she saw some other man, young, full of power to call out love, and her heart went out to him Arthur Ruthven laid his head on his arms,

and when, long after, he raised it, his sleeves were soaked through with a rain of tears.

CHAPTER III.

ONE August morning when Mr. Ruthven came down to breakfast, he found amongst other letters the following :—

“ DEAR RUTHVEN,

“ Last year, in Gibraltar, you kindly gave me an open invitation to visit you whenever I happened to be in England. I have just got my leave, and as my people are travelling, and will not be home for some time, I shall be very glad to run down to Ruthven Court for a few days, if you can take me in.

“ Sincerely yours,

“ WALTER NASH.”

Mr. Ruthven sent off a cordial reply,

begging Captain Nash to come at once and make the Court his home as long as he felt disposed. The year before they had spent a great deal of time together, had made excursions into Africa, ridden and sketched together, and been on very pleasant terms of intimacy. So that but for one reason Mr. Ruthven would have hailed his friend's advent with real pleasure. But now that his heart was so full of little Maud, that she was so all in all to him, he could not help but remember that Walter Nash was young and handsome, and a very great favourite with women. He tried to stifle the jealous dread that gnawed his heart at the remembrance, and said bitterly under his breath fifty times in the day, "It must come sooner or later: why not now?"

Four days after his letter, Captain Nash arrived at the Court. He was charmed with the house, the grounds, the park, the pictures, but felt a certain shade of disap-

pointment at finding his friend living quietly alone, when he had expected to meet a party. Walter Nash was a good-looking, selfish young fellow, with very pleasant manners, and a most happy knack of making everything and everyone subservient to his own convenience. He soon made up his mind that a few days at the Court would be quite enough, and set to work to arrange the disposal of his time in the most agreeable manner to himself.

“Now, Ruthven, don’t let me disturb your manner of living the least in the world,” he said at breakfast the first morning. “I’ve brought my fishing rod, and if you’ll allow me, I’ll start off down that charming trout stream I see at the end of the park, and have a day’s sport all to myself.”

“So be it,” acquiesced his host; “I am compelled to go into the town to-day on business, and as Bourne is not particularly interesting, and there’s nothing to be seen

but a lot of farmers and rustics, I am sure you'll be much better amused with your rod and line."

So after breakfast the friends separated, one to business, the other to while away the hours until dinner time. Captain Nash was very well pleased with his choice of amusement. He had very good sport, and late in the afternoon retraced his steps laden with spoil to the Court. At a bend in the river, he came suddenly upon a picture which pleased him so well that he stopped to look intently at it. Half lying on the soft green turf, under the shade of a spreading beech, one hand under her pretty head, the other thrown across the neck of an immense St. Bernard, was a young girl who for grace and beauty might have been the Undine of that limpid stream or the guardian nymph of the forest. So thought Walter Nash, and almost feared by a single movement to dispel the illusion; but at the moment,

part of his fishing tackle fell noisily to the ground; the dog started up with a bound, and the wood-nymph, disconcerted, rose quickly from her graceful posture, and stood somewhat confused looking at him.

“I beg ten thousand pardons for my interruption,” began the young man, taking the straw hat from his yellow curling hair, and quite forgetting, as he fixed his blue eyes admiringly upon her, that he had no right to speak to a young lady to whom he had not first been formally introduced. Little Maud looked at the handsome speaker with shy eyes, and, not knowing exactly what answer to make, blushed still deeper. But here Lion thought it high time to interfere, and, looking up at the stranger, gave a deep low growl, and showed his teeth.

“Oh, hush, Lion!” said Maud quickly; “you mustn’t growl, sir; that’s very naughty.”

“I am so sorry I disturbed you,” said

Walter penitently ; “ had I only seen you a little sooner, I would rather have walked a mile round than disturb so charming a picture.”

“ Thank you,” faltered Maud ; “ but it does not matter the least in the world ; we were only resting for a moment before going home. Be quiet, sir !” This to Lion, who still insisted on grunting his dissatisfaction in a low ouf, ouf.

“ What a magnificent fellow !” said Walter, anxious to prolong the conversation.

“ Yes,” assented Maud ; “ but he does not like strangers ; he always growls at them, at least when he is alone with me.”

“ I don’t wonder at his being severe and suspicious when he has such a treasure to guard,” said the young man softly.

Maud turned as if to go ; a sudden thought struck Captain Nash.

“ I am a stranger in these parts,” he said ; “ and I have lost my way. Can you

tell me the nearest road to Ruthven Court?"

"Ruthven Court?" echoed Maud, with brightening eyes; "you are Captain Nash, then?"

"Yes, that is my name. You know my friend Ruthven, perhaps?"

"Know him?" cried Maud with a little laugh; "he is our dearest friend. I am going home past the Court now, and I will show you the way if you please."

"A thousand thanks;" and Maud caught up her straw hat from the ground, slung it across her arm, and with the rosy fingers of the other hand grasping Lion's collar, while he still expressed audible dissatisfaction, she turned and walked slowly by Walter's side in the direction of the Court. Sometimes she cast a furtive glance at the distinguished-looking figure in the velvet shooting-coat, and thought how different he was from any one she had ever seen before. She chatted away to

him about Mr. Ruthven, about her home, her dog, about a thousand things, in her naïve, childish way; and Captain Nash listening to her, and ever and anon casting a side glance at the animated face framed in rippling hair, thought her the dearest, sweetest little type of maidenhood that ever blessed the eyes of man. He was sorry when presently they came to the Park gates, and she said :

“ I must leave you here ; this other path leads to the Rectory.”

“ Do let me take you home,” he said ; “ I will be sure not to miss my way now.”

“ Oh no, thanks !” laughed Maud ; “ Lion is quite sufficient escort,—I never need any other. Good-bye !” and she stretched out a little hand with sweet familiarity. “ Tell Mr. Ruthven that you met me.”

“ You forget that I am not so fortunate as to know your name,” said Walter taking

the proffered fingers, and feeling strongly inclined to kiss them.

“ My name ? Ah, yes, I forgot. Maud Douglas. Good-bye. Come, Lion.” And the little nymph tripped gracefully away down the glade, while Captain Nash watched her with keen interest in his eyes.

After dinner, as host and guest sat smoking together, Walter commenced :

“ I met a most charming little friend of yours in my wanderings to-day, Ruthven.”

“ Indeed !” and Mr. Ruthven gave a slight start. “ Who was it ?”

“ Maud Douglas.”

The colour deepened on Arthur’s bronzed face, and he looked up sharply. To hear his idol’s name pronounced thus glibly by a stranger grated inexpressibly upon his ears. Walter must have seen the look of annoyance, for he hastened to say :

“ I am speaking from the young lady’s own authority. She bade me tell you I had met Maud Douglas.”

“And where did you meet her?” Mr. Ruthven asked, trying to soften his voice, that had grown harsh from sudden pain.

“Down by the river. I was returning laden with spoils, when, at a bend, I came suddenly on such a sweet picture that I held my breath, fearful of destroying it. There was a graceful young girl half-lying on the bank under the trees, with one arm thrown round a splendid dog couched at her side. I would have given the world for my pencil and sketch-book, but, at the moment, I dropped my rod, and dog and mistress sprang up at a bound. I apologised, and asked my way to the Court, and Miss Douglas inquired if my name was Nash, and at once volunteered to be my guide. She talked so much of you, by the way,”—Walter went on, knowing with intuitive tact that his host was not pleased—“told me you were her greatest friend, that, since your re-

turn, life at the Rectory had been quite different."

"Miss Douglas was very good," Arthur remarked stiffly. For the life of him he could not make his tone genial or hearty.

"I hope you will take me to the Rectory to call," said Walter, not caring very much whether his friend was pleased or annoyed. "Miss Douglas is the most charming specimen of womanhood my eyes have rested on for many a long day; she seems like an angel from heaven after the poor painted dolls of Seville and Madrid—eh, Ruthven?" And Captain Nash raised his handsome face from the apricot he was peeling, and looked so provokingly like a young Apollo, with his blue eyes and tawny golden locks, that a dull pain shot through the heart of the man who loved hopelessly, and he said to himself,

"It has come at last. Better now than when it was too late."

All night he never closed his eyes, but paced restlessly up and down, with a vague bitter jealousy gnawing at his heart-strings. Wild thoughts crowded his brain. If he could only make some excuse and get rid of this man without letting Maud see him again ; then he would heap such love and care upon her she must perforce come to love him. He would fulfil her every wish, gratify her every whim ; or he would implore her upon his knees to have pity on him and to be his wife. Only once his—and the blood surged to brain and heart until every sense beat and quickened madly—and then come death, come night, come despair. What mattered anything Life held or Fate threatened after that supreme happiness ! But those were only the mad thoughts of a mad moment. Reason came, came struggling against passion, and whispered with all the resistless force of that calm voice which will be

heard above all storms of rage and agony that rack the human breast. Is the prize you covet a lifeless form? Would you have the body without the heart? Would the cold tolerance of pity be enough to satisfy a love like yours? Arthur Ruthven groaned as the exceeding bitterness of that thought forced itself upon him. Then good-bye hope, good-bye all dreams of pleasant days, in which the echo of loved voices and little feet had made sweet music in his ears. Back to the old life—life without love, without hope of brightness—life in which cold science and musty booklore were the only wife and child he would ever gather to his heart. He reproached himself bitterly with selfishness—told himself a thousand times that if his love for her was real, was beyond self-seeking, he would rejoice in her happiness, and be content to sacrifice his own pleasure to hers.

“Will you come to the Rectory with me

to-day?" he asked his guest the next morning after breakfast, and Captain Nash declared he should be charmed, and lounged on to the terrace with the languid grace and self-possession of a man prepared for easy conquest. Arthur Ruthven felt a sudden devilish desire spring up in him to seize this man by the throat and maul out every trace of beauty from the Apollo-like face. Conquering his rage as quickly, he turned half-ashamed and walked back into the house to command his voice. Twenty minutes later, the two men entered the dining-room at the Rectory. But they found only Mr. Douglas and Granny. Maud had just gone out, her father said, but she would probably be with Bell Walton—he had sent the servant to see. In a few minutes Maud was seen coming quickly up the garden path with Lion bounding on in front. As she entered the room she stopped short, blushed vividly, and then greeted her visitors shyly. But

as she held out her hand to the stranger Arthur Ruthven saw a light come into her eyes that had never dawned there for him.

CHAPTER IV.

THE summer days passed swiftly by—
swiftly, and ah, how happily for Maud,
in this golden dawn of love that had
broken for her. She seemed to tread on
air for very joy of her life, that life which
had always been serene and gladsome, and
was so full to overflowing of all brightness
now that the diviner element of love had
entered it. How could she know, innocent
child, that such rosy hues come but once in
the prism of life; that the brighter the
colouring, the more quickly it fades, like
the hot sunshine in April, more vivid be-
fore the heavy shower? Just now the
blind goddess stood by her wheel a fairy
godmother to the girl, painting her life in

all the fairest colours, unshadowed, by one darker line.

“Love took up the glass of Time, and turned it in his glowing hands ;
Every moment, lightly shaken, ran itself in golden sands.”

Walter Nash was always by her side—in the Rectory parlour, in the oaken picture galleries at Ruthven Court, in the long shady avenues, by the trout stream, or plucking wild flowers in the woods. And with unconscious, unintentional selfishness, Maud forgot to miss the friend through whom, during the last months, all her gladness had come ; and when, always absent, he sent shallow excuses and pretexts for his absence, she failed to note their unreality. It was always Walter who brought them, and what thought had she of anyone away while he was by her side. How her ears drank in the whispered flatteries of love ; how passing sweet were those rambles in the summer twilight, when a long silence was even happier than all words !

Captain Nash stayed on at the Court for his own selfish pleasure, taking advantage of the invitation that was now and again renewed with cold courtesy. But one morning a letter came pressing him urgently to spend a month in Yorkshire for the partridge shooting, and such were the temptations offered that Walter hesitated before declining it. First-rate sport, a house full of pleasant people, some very pretty girls, dancing every night, &c., &c. The young man leaned his arms on the window-sill and mused, as he watched the wreaths of thin smoke curling from his lips over the pros and cons for accepting or declining the invitation.

“ Sir Geoffry is a good-natured old fellow, has plenty of interest; the daughters are pretty, and will have twenty thousand apiece. I must marry money. I’m deuced hard up now, and Jack hints something in his letter about an heiress. I shouldn’t take long cutting him out,” and Walter passed

his hand complacently through his yellow curls. "I don't like leaving dear little Maud. I shall miss her awfully at first, dear little innocent darling. After her sweet childish ways, how I shall detest the tricks and artificial sentiment of women of the world. But it must have an end some time. And so," concluded the young man rising slowly, "I'll write a line and say I'll be there next Thursday. How ever shall I tell little Maud? I hope to heaven she won't cry or make a scene. It will be better to say nothing to her until a day or two before; one may as well have things pleasant and tranquil as long as possible. The old Rector don't look like a man to ask one's intentions. Gad! I wish she was a little higher or a good deal lower. I know it'll go deuced hard with me saying good-bye to her."

It was the Tuesday before his departure. Mr. Ruthven had been apprised of his intended movements, and had asked Mr.

Douglas and his daughter to dinner in the evening. How sore Arthur's heart was as he made that sacrifice.

"Of course he will propose to her before he goes," he said to himself with great bitterness, "and that will give him an opportunity of talking matters over with Mr. Douglas."

Dinner was just over when a messenger came begging the clergyman to go immediately to a woman in the village who was dying. He rose at once.

"I will come for you, dear, as soon as possible," he said to Maud. "If it should be late Mr. Ruthven will send you home, I know."

Maud went to the door with her father, and when he was gone, she did not return to the dining-room, but went into the morning-room that adjoined, and sat down on the window-ledge with Lion's great head on her lap. The sun had set, but the sky was still red with luminous clouds—scarce

a breath of air stirred the dark branches of the cedars—there was only a soft twittering of birds singing lullaby to their little ones, and Maud sat looking out at the bright flower borders, the wood beyond, and the silver thread of water winding below, and she felt a soft hushed consciousness of great happiness—so great that she heaved a gentle sigh of intense content.

“Sighing, little Maud?” said a low voice behind her, and turning with bright eyes she saw that Walter Nash was standing watching her.

“I did not hear you come in,” she said smiling. “Where is Mr. Ruthven?”

“I don’t know,” Walter answered carelessly. “I thought he was following me. Do you want him?”

“No;” and through the open window the sound of their voices came in to Mr. Ruthven, and his face contracted with a sudden spasm of pain.

Walter sat down on the ledge beside

Maud, taking her hand tenderly in his, while Lion looked on with jealous suspicion. He had never quite overcome his distrust of the young man.

“Are you happy, Maud?” Walter asked in a low voice, looking at her with love in his eyes.

“Happy?” and she lifted the lustrous hazel orbs in supreme confidence and trust to his. “Oh! yes, so happy!”

“Do you know, little Maud, that I am very miserable to-night?” he said presently, concentrating all the tenderness he was capable of into voice and eyes.

“You miserable! oh, why?” exclaimed Maud with sweet concern.

“The last month has been so happy for me, and I think you have cared for it too, have you not, little Maud?”

“Ah, yes!” and a vague terror of what was coming overshadowed her, and almost unconsciously she clasped the finger that held hers.

He carried the little hand to his lips, kissing it passionately.

"My darling, if I could only stay with you always!"

"Why must you go?" she faltered.

"I have stayed already too long for my own peace of mind," said Walter in a low voice, feeling in his heart that he had behaved badly, and anxious to persuade himself that he suffered as much as this ewe lamb whom he had robbed of her sweet innocent happiness. "Ah, Maud! if I were only master of these broad acres, like Ruthven, how happy we might be; but I am cursed with poverty. I might as well cut off my right hand as ask you to be my wife."

Arthur Ruthven heard every word. It seemed to pierce his brain like molten lead; he had no thought that he was listening to a conversation not meant for his ears. Only one great agony of pity for the girl he loved so dearly overwhelmed

him. A crushing contempt and loathing for the man who could sacrifice that guileless heart to an hour's amusement. He waited in breathless pain for Maud's answer; but none came. He strained his ears to hear, and they caught a low agonised sob that went to his very heart. He sprang up with sudden madness; for a moment he felt he must confront Captain Nash, and pour out his wrath in fierce words and blows; then with a violent effort he controlled himself and went out through the hall-door towards the park. He could not stay there to hear that low heart-broken cry a second time; it would have driven him mad. He went quickly out and up through the park into the woods, and there he flung himself with his face downwards to the earth in an agony of pain. His was no selfish misery; he was not grieving because he could not win what he prized so dearly; what he felt was one great heart-aching pity for

the tender little one he would have laid his life down to shield from suffering. How he longed for revenge on the man who had been his friend—the very hatred of Cain rose in his breast towards him ! When Maud was gone, he would confront him ; would brand him the base hound, the dishonourable blackguard that he was. Nash would call him out, and a murderous joy leapt up in Arthur's heart at the bare thought ; but, as he grew calmer, he remembered that without dishonour to himself he could not infringe the sacred laws of hospitality. This man was his guest, and so long as he remained under his roof must be safe from anger or insult. There was but way one left : Arthur felt he must leave the house until Captain Nash was out of it. To meet him again with any pretence of friendship or civility was out of the question ; so he retraced his steps, and stole into the Court by a side door like a thief.

“Pack me things enough for three days, and send them after me to Bourne,” he said to his man; “I shall be away until Saturday.” Then he went to the stables, ordered his horse to be saddled, and ten minutes later was galloping furiously over the downs towards the sea.

“I don’t know what the doose is come to master,” his valet remarked to the butler; “he’s gone off somewhere all in a hurry, an’ never left no message or nothing for the Captain.”

“You mark my words, Horton,” returned the other in a solemn confidential tone, “I don’t know nothing, nor I don’t suspec’ nothing; but when gents takes those sudden freaks, an’ goes off at night-time a-sourin’ the country like mad, you may take my word for it—an’ I’ve had a deal of experience in those matters—*there’s a woman at the bottom of it.*”

CHAPTER V.

NO more sunshine for little Maud ; no more gay songs and laughter for very gladness of heart ; no more light feet dancing for joy across the green sward. Only a dull pain at the heart, a great unfilled void, a longing not to be satisfied. And then tears at night, sorrow in the day-time, loneliness always ; and when Mr. Ruthven, after many days, found courage to come to the Rectory, he saw what a painful prescience had warned him of—hollow eyes, forced smiles, and a dull silent misery that half broke his heart. If he could only have taken the little wounded dove to his

breast, and soothed her pain with loving sympathy !

He dared not come very often ; it made him so miserable to see her wan little face that had always until now been so blithe and smiling ; and he said sorrowfully enough in his heart, “ She does not miss me.”

Autumn passed ; the leaves yellowed and fell from the trees. Dreariness came over the landscape ; frost, cold, and snow, and winter commened his reign. After that the spring, and people began to look curiously at little Maud, and to wonder why her cheeks were so wan and had lost the roses of other days. Granny fidgeted and worried, her father looked anxiously at her ; Mr. Ruthven underwent tortures of apprehension on her account. He would have had the most celebrated physicians to see her ; would have taken her half over the world in search of health ; and he was obliged to be silent, or content himself with an occa-

sional hint to Mr. Douglas. At last he could bear it no longer, and said to the rector :

“ I don’t want to alarm you, Mr. Douglas ; but I really think you should have some advice for your daughter. Let me send a carriage to take you into Bourne one morning. They say Dr. Arnold is very clever in cases of——” he stopped, afraid for his own sake to finish the sentence.

Mr. Douglas acted upon his friend’s suggestion, and Maud was taken for the physician to pass sentence upon. After very careful examination, he pronounced that there was no danger, but a great deal of delicacy—the nervous system was disordered.

“ I don’t think medicine would be any use at all in this case,” he said ; “ she seems to me to want a complete change of scene. If you could only manage to take her abroad for a month or two, I believe

she would come back as well as ever she was in her life ; but if she leads the same stagnant existence three months longer, I won't answer for the consequences. You say she has nothing preying upon her mind ; that makes her delicacy the more difficult to account for. Well, the only advice I can give you is, let her have a complete change, and, *if possible*, take her abroad."

Mr. Douglas repeated the physician's opinion in despair to Mr. Ruthven.

"I don't see how I could possibly manage it," he said anxiously. "I should not like to leave my parish ; it is ten years since I was away for more than a week. Neither Maud nor I know a word of any language but our own—and—and I really don't see how I could afford it."

"Surely Mr. Douglas you would rather make any sacrifice than lose your daughter."

Mr. Ruthven spoke hotly ; his words

were almost unfeeling in his intense anxiety.

“ You don’t mean you think there is any danger of her dying,” faltered the old man trembling like a leaf.

“ No, no, no ; please God, none at all,” answered Mr. Ruthven hastily ; “ but you must make any sacrifice to get her abroad.”

He paused for a moment in uncertainty, his heart beating with agitation.

“ Mr. Douglas,” he said in a low voice, forcing the words out slowly and painfully, “ I love your daughter with all my heart. I have loved her from the first moment that I saw her lying on the grass in the apple orchard. I know I am a great deal too old for her. I feel it more impossible even than I see by your face you do that she could ever love me well enough to marry me ; perhaps she will never know how I care for her. Rest assured that, unless I have reason to believe she feels something warmer than friendship for me,

(and God knows I never expect that time to come), my lips shall remain sealed on what I have said to you to-day. I am rich, as you know; my only thought and care in life are for Maud; won't you let me do for her what I should have a right to if she only cared for me? Let me go abroad with you, and manage everything for her comfort and benefit; if you are afraid of idle tongues, I will not join you until you have left England, and no one will know I am with you. For her sake, don't refuse; your acceptance of my offer binds neither her nor you to anything; only take time to consider."

And Mr. Douglas went home and thought most seriously over the matter; and then, overcome by his fears for Maud, he wrote consent to Mr. Ruthven's proposal. But he did not even tell Maud of the arrangement; merely bade her have all things ready to start in a week. The girl fretted at the thought; she did not want to go;

she dreaded the long journey, and the thought of foreign lands and foreign people. She shed many tears over Granny, who was full of gloomy mistrust and forebodings; and when she bade her faithful old dog a last farewell, and laid her head against his, she sobbed as if her heart would break. But two days later, when she landed on the sunny shores of France, and saw Mr. Ruthven on the pier waiting to receive them, her face brightened, and she felt more glad than she had done for many weary months.

I do not mean to pretend for one moment that all this time, during which she had grown so pale and thin, Maud had been grieving and despairing about Walter Nash, but she had never recovered from the long days and nights of pain that had followed his desertion, and having grown into a listless languid frame of mind and body, she wanted some powerful reaction to bring her back to her old lightness of

heart and gaiety. Nothing could have acted more perfectly than the trip abroad. They travelled through the fairest scenes of Normandy, through Switzerland and Germany—not hurriedly as tourists, but taking time to see and enjoy everything thoroughly. Every comfort and luxury that money could buy, the rich man heaped round his darling; and when he saw the brightness come back to her dear eyes, and a shade like the soft pink Provence roses in her cheeks, he thanked God as he had never done in his life before. And Maud, as she listened to the stories he had to tell of everything they saw, began to be impressed with the strongest veneration for his wisdom and learning, and to look upon him as the ideal hero she had talked of to Bell Walton that May day long ago in the apple orchard. It was delightful to her to feel that sweet dependence upon him, to look to him for everything; and sometimes she wondered a little if he loved

her, and thought she would be glad to know he did. But Mr. Ruthven put an iron guard on lips and eyes, lest haply by betraying the passion that so swayed him, he might scare away these pleasant days for ever, and bring restraint upon the intercourse that was now so sweetly familiar and happy. Only once he broke down. Mr. Douglas was in the reading-room of the hotel, and Maud had wandered through the open windows to the garden past which the yellow Rhine swept rapidly. Everything was hushed in the soft twilight: the sweet scent of flowers was heavy on the air, and Maud, leaning against the low wall, looked smiling in his face.

“To think I should have dreaded coming abroad so!” she said in a low, laughing voice; “it seemed to me some fearful ordeal from which I should never return alive.”

“And you have not been very unhappy,

then?" uttered Arthur looking fondly at the upturned face.

"Unhappy! I never was so happy in all my life before."

"Not last July?" he asked quickly. It was the first time he had ever alluded to the past.

The colour deepened a little on Maud's cheek, but she raised her serene eyes to his with sweet confidence, and answered simply, "Never in all my life."

He caught one of her hands, covering it with passionate kisses. Then, angry with himself, he turned away, and went into the house. But Maud felt glad in her heart, for she knew now that he loved her. From that day Mr. Ruthven saw with supreme gladness that the girl was not indifferent to him; that the colour came to her cheeks and the light to her eyes for him, as once before he had seen them, in an agony of jealousy, come for Walter

Nash. But he kept himself from uttering a word of love to her, arguing that, once more at home, living quietly amongst less exciting scenes, she would know better what her real feelings for him were. And meantime little Maud began to fear that she had been mistaken in thinking this great clever being loved her, and to adore and worship him far more fervently than she had done her young blue-eyed lover of last year.

* * * * *

It was a warm day in late July, and Maud lay half-reclined on the long grass under the old apple-trees, green and shady now. One arm was round Lion's neck as of old, and in the other hand she held a book, which now and again she made a feint of reading. Presently the orchard gate opened, and Mr. Ruthven came in. She did not rise, but smiled up at him as he leaned against the knotted trunk of the old tree that sheltered her.

"I have come to say good-bye, Maud," he said, looking fixedly at her.

She started to a sitting posture, and looked at him with eager eyes.

"To say good-bye! Where are you going?"

"To India, perhaps."

Her face blanched suddenly. She uttered a little cry and rose to her feet. The big tears came into her eyes, and she would have turned away to hide them, but he caught her in his arms.

"Shall I stay, darling?"

"Oh yes, yes, yes!" and the blushing cheek was hidden against his shoulder. "I should die if you left me now."

"Do you love me then, little Maud?" but no reply came this time, for in the most unreasonable manner Arthur Ruthven was himself preventing the answer he desired.







